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‘YOU JUST KNOW’:
A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY EXAMINING
HOW TO RECOGNIZE WHEN YOU ARE CALLED

by

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A DISSERTATION

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A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY EXAMINING
HOW TO RECOGNIZE WHEN YOU ARE CALLED

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University of Nebraska, 2012

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This phenomenological study describes the experiences of 12 residents of a Midwestern community who were identified by their peers as possibly possessing a calling. The central research question was: What are the experiences that lead to feelings of strong commitment in their lives? Calling was defined as a summons, which originates outside of one’s self, to serve a cause that betters humanity. Participants described the strong commitments they felt in their lives and explained their origins. Five themes emerged from the semi-structure interviews: (a) “You have to be asked and respond to being asked” – the role of a mentor in one’s calling, (b) the call to service: “It just happened.”, (c) calls can come at unexpected times, (d) answering a call can be rewarding – but those rewards aren’t always obvious, and (e) secular callings can come from a religious calling. The essence of recognizing one’s calling was the realization that a calling can come at a moment’s notice – even if it isn’t immediately recognized – and the source of this call can be a summons to serve – society, and one’s God, family, community and profession.

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*He asked the president and the dean if they had had a Call.
Oh, yes, certainly; but they were vague about practical tips
as to how to invite a Call and recognize it when it came.
Sinclair Lewis' Elmer Gantry*

Chapter 1

Introduction of the Study

The stick figures of her five children affixed to the rear window of her Chevy Suburban serve as a reminder of the small-town mother's fulfilled calling to her family.

The business owner keeps a Bible on the coffee table of her waiting room as an extension of her calling to serve her Lord.

The longtime businessman could be retired, but keeps working to support his calling to serve destitute citizens of a Third World country. A crude wooden map that hangs on his office wall reminds him of his service and serves as a conversation starter for those who come calling to discuss his calling.

A calling, according to Baumeister (1991), is a way to fulfill one's need to feel value. Callings promise fulfillment.

Sometimes, however, these callings collide. And sometimes, they go fulfilled or unrecognized.

The young businessman – after being challenged to help better his community – realized he is called to serve. Time spent serving his community, however, means time spent away from his family. The man realizes he needs perspective and eventually figures out how to keep his callings in balance.

The local mayor and fulltime educator realizes he doesn't have enough time to fulfill the duties of his volunteer government position while devoting adequate time to

work with his students. His callings to serve his community and to be an educator are in conflict. He realizes something must give, and retires from teaching to devote more time to being mayor. “I never wanted to starve the teaching because it was that important to me. There was an opportunity to step away financially, physically, and be able to devote myself as much as I wanted to the mayor position. Over a short amount of time, it became clear to me what the future was for me.”

People may face numerous callings – to their profession, to their community, to their family, and to their God. How they recognize these callings, and manage them when they come in multiples, is the focus of this study.

Introduction and Statement of the Problem

Callings generally are associated with a sense of purpose or direction that leads a person to greater fulfillment... “sometimes with references to God or the divine, sometimes with reference to a sense of passion or giftedness” (Dik & Duffy, 2009, p.427). Callings often are associated with work, but not always (Schuurman, 2004).

A calling can be associated with a sense of duty to serve a higher being (Davidson & Caddell, 1994) and a summons from a higher being to perform a type of work (Dalton, 2001). A calling also can refer to an approach to work based on motivation to feel fulfillment and a desire to impact society (Wrzesniewski, McCauley, Rozin, & Schwartz, 1997).

Researchers agree that a calling comes in the form of a summons to fulfill a sense of duty or responsibility. Callings come at various times in one’s life and they can come in multiples. They can come at work or in one’s personal life. The challenge is that

callings can go unrecognized. The literature is largely void of an explanation about how these callings can be recognized, and how to respond when a calling is received. A substantive look into how callings are received, the subject of this paper, provides insight into the process and, ultimately, may ensure that these callings do not go unrecognized. Recognition of one's callings may lead to greater personal fulfillment and to better productivity in the workplace, and may be the impetus for stronger relationships between leaders and their followers.

Definitions of Callings

The myriad of applications and approaches to callings have led to a myriad of definitions, including ones that differentiate callings from vocations. While the two constructs are similar, researchers denote differences. As part of their review of interdisciplinary literature on calling and vocation in an attempt to encourage research in this area, Dik and Duffy (2009) offered their own definition:

A calling is a transcendent summons, experiences as originating beyond the self, to approach a particular life role in a manner oriented toward demonstrating or deriving a sense of purpose or meaningfulness and that holds other-oriented values and goals as primary sources of motivation (p. 427).

Schuster (2003) suggested that callings are central to one's existence and well-being. "Calls are invitations from life to serve, to activate your will toward a cause worthy of you and the human family" (p. 13).

Dik, Duffy, and Eldridge (2009) focused on calling and vocation, and their meaning for work. They defined vocations as an "approach to a particular life role that is

oriented toward demonstrating or deriving a sense of purpose or meaningfulness and that holds other-oriented values and goals as primary sources of motivation” (p. 428). While they say calling and vocation overlap considerably, they note the importance of the distinction. People with callings and vocations, according to Dik, Duffy, and Eldridge (2009), connect their work to a sense of purpose and meaningfulness toward results that focus on others. “...but only individuals with callings perceive the impetus to approach work in this manner as originating from a source external to the self” (p. 428).

The concept of possessing a vocation developed in early Christianity when the apostle Paul used the Latin word *vocatio* when referring to God’s bidding, practicing the spiritual gifts of prophecy, and preaching (Calhoun, 1935). The premise that a wide variety of occupations can be viewed as calling or vocation, dates to the 16th century and possibly earlier (Dik & Duffy, 2009). Weber (1963) referred to a calling as resulting from divine inspiration to pursue work that is morally responsible. In recent times, a multitude of authors, according to Dik and Duffy (2009), have stressed the importance of reconnecting calling and vocation as a way to inject meaning and value into work and other life roles.

Schuster (2003) states that people may experience multiple callings throughout their lives. Those calls must be balanced, combined, renewed, and rediscovered. All require a response, according to Schuster. “There may be a constant thread through the callings in your life, but you may also have disjointed chapters and blind alleys that leave you stumped as to their commonality” (p. 5).

I witnessed my father answer his multiple callings, during a 40-year span, as he served his profession, his community, his family, and his God. His callings, at times,

created conflict among these entities, especially when his devotion to his profession clashed with his devotion to his community. Still, he managed to differentiate his callings and pay homage to each. He served as publisher and editor of a small Nebraska weekly newspaper, served as an informal leader in his community, ensured that his family was provided for, and never hesitated to profess his faith in his God.

His approach to life – and his callings – serves as the inspiration for this query into how callings can be recognized, differentiated, and embraced.

Significance of the Study

Levoy (1997) calls it a critical challenge of discernment: knowing whether one's calls are true or false, and whether to respond. "...knowing whether a call really belongs to us or not—requires that we also treat a path between two essential questions: 'What is right for me?' and 'Where am I willing to be led?'" (p. 7). Left out of Levoy's premise is the challenge of first recognizing those calls.

Levoy (1997) explains that one needs to recognize those calls because they come in many forms. Again, missing is an explanation of how to recognize those calls when they appear. Finally, Levoy challenges those called to respond. And, again, no guidelines for recognizing those calls.

Schuster (2003) contends that calls appear in everyday life – the recipient, however, faces many challenges in answering them. Believing that one is experiencing a call is first among those challenges.

My first research question probed this missing phenomenon in the literature: recognizing a calling. The question asked participants to describe their lived experiences

that led to feelings of commitment to a particular aspect in their lives. Accompanying the first research question was a probe question, which was accompanied by the working definition of a calling, that focused on what aspect in those experiences made the participant realize he or she was being called to respond.

Purpose Statement

Sometimes, callings go unrecognized, thus preventing people from living up to their potential. The purpose of this study was to explore how to recognize one's callings, how to gauge their strength, and how to resolve the potential conflict that is created should these callings collide. Using a semi-structured interview process with residents of a rural Midwestern community as they described their lives and the commitments they felt, I hoped to discover how individuals recognized and embraced their callings, how they managed them when they overlap.

Research Questions

The central question explored with participants was: "What are the experiences that lead to feelings of strong commitment in a person's life?" From this central question, other questions emerged that explored the process of recognizing one's callings and the concept of managing multiple callings.

Delimitations

This study focused on the life experiences of 12 residents of a rural Midwest community. Their ages ran from the 30s to the 70s. Subjects, whose names were

changed to protect their identities, were chosen for this study through snowball sampling, which started with the author seeking suggestions from several community leaders – the community’s mayor, superintendent of schools, chamber of commerce president and chamber of commerce executive director. These leaders were asked to identify residents from their community whom they believed were experiencing or had experienced a calling or callings. These leaders also were asked to answer questions from the Servant Leader Questionnaire that deal with calling about each of their suggested candidates. Those candidates who were suggested multiple times and those who were rated high in calling by their peers were asked to participate. Data collected were the responses to the interviewer’s questions and the stories participants told of their life experiences in response to the questions.

Limitations

The author of this study operated on the premise that multiple residents in a given Midwestern community could be experiencing callings or have experienced them at some point in their lifetime. The author grew up in a rural Midwestern community and based his premise partly on his father’s life. Twelve subjects were selected for participation in the study based, partly, on an opportunistic approach to purposeful sampling. Subjects hailed from the Midwest, a region of the country targeted based, in part, because the author lives in this area. This region also was targeted because of a readily available subject pool and the author’s familiarity with the residents of the community. Finally, this region was selected because community leaders were willing to assist in identifying others in their community whom they believed were experiencing or had experienced a

calling. No other community was considered, nor were prospective participants from other communities approached.

While careful consideration was given to include participants of varying ages and race, and both genders, participants were included solely based on recommendations from their peers. All participants were Caucasian, but both genders and residents of varied ages were well represented in the study.

Another limitation of this study is the author's admission that he has never experienced a calling. The author also admits that he waits for his calling and desires one. Readers must decide whether the author's lack of calling and his desire to receive one in any way skews the findings of this study. They may, however, realize that the author's interest in calling overshadows the lack of experience of possessing one.

Chapter 2

Review of the Literature

Researchers agree that callings can come in many forms – and at various times in one’s life. These callings can be strong, or mild. Society has recognized their importance, beginning in biblical times. The literature is full of insight about callings, and the potential for additional query.

Historically, callings have been associated with a religious experience (Steger, Pickering, Shin, & Dik, 2010). Recently, however, researchers have taken a more secular approach to calling, focusing instead on meaning and personal fulfillment in work. The concept of calling and work has roots in religious tradition. Up until the Reformation, work was viewed as necessary, but not necessarily something that brought fulfillment. The Protestant Reformation changed this approach to work. Martin Luther expanded the view of calling that one pleased God and benefited society by fulfilling one’s duties. John Calvin expanded this viewpoint by expressing that work could be personal and uniquely fulfilling. In classic formulations, then, calling is that place in the world of productive work that one was created, designed, or destined to fill by virtue of God-given gifts and talents, and the opportunities presented by one’s station in life” (Bunderson & Thompson, 2009, p. 33). Consequently, individuals – through their God-given talents and stations in life – are suited for special courses in life. But through this uniqueness comes the obligation “to make whatever sacrifices might be required to diligently and faithfully fulfill the duties associated with it for the glory of God and the welfare of the human family” (p. 33).

Having a sense of meaning and purpose are constructs that overlap with calling (Hunter, Dik, and Banning, 2010). Wolf (2010) states that finding one's passion often is associated with experiencing a type of positive feeling about the pursuit. Baumeister (1991) contends that a calling inherently is an effective way to satisfy one's need to feel value. In addition, callings may promise fulfillment. "Your calling is your destiny, and that is the road to fulfillment" (p. 126.) Baumeister explains that calling and destiny are linked regardless of whether the source of the call is external or internal. The expectation, then, is that pursuing one's destiny will lead to fulfillment, which, however, isn't always realized (Wolf, 2010).

Definitions of a Calling

While Dik and Duffy (2009) describe a calling as a "transcendent summons" (p. 427), Schuster (2003) describes a calling as "invitations from life to serve" (p. 13).

Levoy (1997) suggests that callings as vocations may come in work, relationships, lifestyle, or service. They may be calls to do something or to be something. They may be calls toward something, away from something or to change something. They may be a summons "toward whatever we've dared and double-dared ourselves to do for as long as we can remember" (p. 3).

Dik and Duffy (2009) proposed calling as involving three overlapping dimensions:

--The first dimension involves the level to which a person perceives his or her motivation within the context of a life role to come from an external source. This

dimension, according to the authors, purposely refrains from defining the content of the perceived source, or sources, of the callings.

--The second dimension involves being aware of the purpose and meaningfulness of a person's activity within a life role, and how effort may be placed in the larger context of purpose and meaning in life.

--The third dimension relates to the concept of "the common good" (p. 427). The dimension assumes that the purpose and meaning taken from activity in a life role was to contribute to the well-being of society. In addition, the definition of this dimension implies that a calling can involve any life role that is not necessarily within the context of work (Schoorman, 2004).

Schuster (2003) described the characteristics of common callings using a two-axis grid (Table 1). The horizontal axis represents the internal and external aspects of callings. The external calling is more visible, the internal one is more mental or abstract. The vertical axis is reserved for head and heart, representing thought and emotions. The head represents cognition, while heart represents emotional intelligence. The author then placed callings in his grid. The calling to spiritual service represents external heart, as does the community calling.

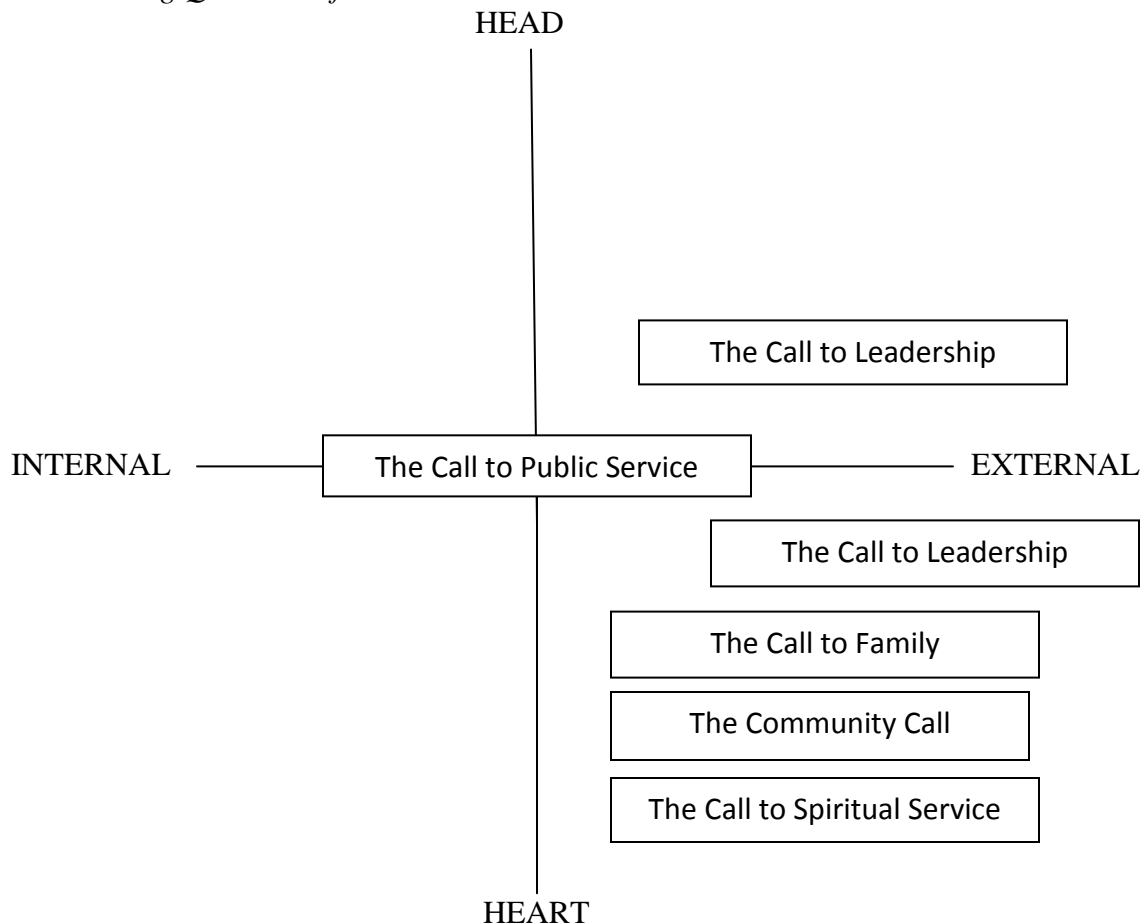
Duffy and Sedlacek (2007) in their study that explored the connection between the presence of a calling and career development, noted that common themes that appear in definitions of callings arise from some force outside the person. Regarding careers and work, themes also pertain to a career that the subject believes is meaningful and somehow promotes a greater good. The authors, however, chose not to connect that external force to a higher power or powers. "It is believed that people may be called

from a variety of sources, and limiting the construct to religious connotations may not represent individuals who feel called to a career from other sources” (p. 592).

The definition of calling that will serve as the framework of this study was constructed by combining those offered by Schuster (2003), and Dik and Duffy (2009): A calling is a summons, which originates outside of one’s self, to serve a cause that betters humanity.

Figure 1

The Working Quadrant of Calls



Note. Adapted from Schuster, J. P. (2003). *Answering your call*. San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers.

Discovering One's Calling

Elangovan, Pinder, and McLean (2010) described the means for discovering one's calling as a "somewhat deliberate process" (p. 433). One approach is that the calling is found through a cause or purpose grounded in the premise that there is a God. The cause may become apparent under certain circumstances. Another approach is that an interactive effect is interpreted as a cause worthy of pursuing. The authors, based on their review of the literature, state that four antecedents are required for starting the search for a calling and then discovering it. This study found support for at least two of the antecedents – a willingness to experiment with new paths and a growing understanding of one's self.

An urge to find meaning in one's life. Motivation to find meaning in one's life is critical for initiating and continuing the search for a calling. An urge to find one's calling may come through dissatisfaction in life or a critical incident or life event. Religion could also serve as the impetus for this search. Regardless of the motivation source, "it is necessary for the individual to experience a compelling urge to find meaning in one's life or work to initiate and sustain this process" (p. 434). Without this impetus, efforts to find a calling may be limited to "loops of ruminations, moments of quiet frustration, short-lived aspirations, half-hearted attempts and sporadic progress" (p.434).

Attentiveness. Vigilance – or the state of being ready to discover one's calling – is necessary because calls may vary in their levels of intensity, salience and tangibility. They may come in many forms, including feelings and epiphanies. The ability to

discover a calling is contingent on the individual's willingness to be ready for possibilities.

Willingness to experiment with new paths. Being open to having a calling is a precondition to possessing one. A willingness to experiment and be persistent in the pursuit is critical. "In some situations it may become necessary to 'test' a calling to see if it is appropriate or 'true'" (p. 434). If the test is successful, the search for a calling ends.

Growing understanding of the self. The development of the self is central to calling. "One needs to know who one is for the search for a calling (or the recognition of one) to bear fruit..." (p. 435). The discovery of a calling then can influence or refine an individual's sense of self. "While the interplay between one's sense of self and calling is probably reciprocal, a sufficient understanding of the self is a prerequisite for discovering one's calling" (p. 435).

Elangovan, Pinder, and McLean (2010) state that the four conditions are necessary for someone to discover a calling, but do not guarantee one. "It is possible that one's search may never end or one may misidentify one's calling" (p. 435).

Association with Work

Most people, according to Wrzesniewski, McCauley, Rozin and Schwartz (1997) view their work as a job, a career, or a calling. Basing their work on earlier research by Bellah et al. (1985), the authors explained that those who have a job are only interested in the material benefits they receive from work. Those who have a career see advancement within their profession. Finally, the person with a calling seeks the fulfillment that comes from doing the work.

When callings are connected with work, the result is a powerful sense of being right, good, and necessary, while justifying risks taken, costs incurred, hardships experienced, and sacrifices made (Baumeister, 1991).

According to Gustafson (1982), viewing one's work as a calling, however, can make the worker vulnerable to exploitation. Gustafson illustrated his point by telling the story of his blacksmith grandfather, who was viewed as a model employee in the 1920s, who worked longer hours than necessary because he believed it was his obligation and gave up his company pension because he did not believe he deserved it. "He was as vulnerable to exploitation as a blacksmith as many a social worker has been simply because of a profound sense of calling" (p. 505). Becoming romantic about work can lead one from having his or her justifiable self-interests denied because of a strong sense of vocation.

In their study of zookeepers from 157 different zoos in North America, Bunderson and Thompson (2009) found that connecting work and calling produced mixed results. According to the authors, zookeepers with a calling strongly identified with their work and occupation, and found significance in them. However, these zookeepers were also more likely to see work as a moral duty by sacrificing pay, personal time and on-the-job comfort, while holding their zoo to a higher standard.

Dik and Duffy (2009), in their empirical review of literature relating to calling and vocation, contend that calling, along with vocation, is not exclusive to areas of work involving religious, teaching, or social service careers. "This implies that callings and vocations can be pursued within all occupations, including those that may not appear to enhance the well-being of society in any obvious way" (p. 430).

Rehm (1990), in her article that describes the historically positive meanings of the concept of vocation, described the term, when it is considered to be a spiritual calling, as something special. The spiritual meaning becomes a calling when it is used to accentuate one's gifts or talents. "The fact that individuals live in a career-oriented and a technological society cannot dampen the person's quest for higher principles and long-term directions in the world" (p. 118).

Scott (2007) focused on the metaphor of calling in an attempt to extend career development theory. Three themes surfaced in in-depth interviews with students (N=23) at a small Christian liberal arts college in the eastern United States: The meaning of inner conviction, the meaning of service, and the meaning of corporate. The author reported that calling and entrepreneurial discourses share a commitment to service.

Duffy and Sedlacek (2007), in a study to explore the relationship between the presence of a calling and career development that involved first-year college students, noted that the presence of a calling positively correlated with decidedness, comfort, self-clarity, and choice-work salience. The presence of a calling, however, correlated negatively with indecisiveness and a lack of educational information.

Calling Types

Baumeister (1991) calls religious and artistic vocations the "prototypes" of callings (p. 126). However, the role of housewife and mother are other examples. "Our society has placed a great deal of value on these roles, especially motherhood, which has been regarded as so sacred that it seems sacrilegious to say anything negative about it" (pp. 126-127).

Oates, Hall, Anderson, and Willingham (2008) explored the negative and positive outcomes of assuming multiple roles of career and motherhood. The authors noted that working mothers report inner conflict between their call to parent and their call to their careers. Of the positive outcomes of callings, Reid and Hardy (1999) reported improved self-esteem, a strengthened identity, and the formation of an informal support network. Athletics are another area associated with callings. Baumeister (1991) contends that an athletic career provides careerist glorification of self through achievement. This type of career also provides the athlete with a means to regard his or her efforts as selfless and self-sacrificing, and contributing to a collective cause.

According to Scott (2007), callings can include the full range of sacred and secular occupations without regard to gender, class, or status. Scott noted that the Protestant Reformation extended religious meaning to ordinary life, while citing Mahan (2002): “In this light, calling is viewed as a response to the Creator and as a journey to know God and to discern His voice rather than the voice of ambition and material success” (p. 264).

Gustafson (1982), citing the works of John Calvin taken from the *Institutes for the Christian Religion*, explained that a secret calling is one in which a minister is conscious before God, but does not have a church as a witness to this calling. A churchly call occurs when a person has experienced the rite of ordination for the ministry. Finally, a minister receives a call to serve a particular congregation after its members have agreed to extend this offer for the minister to serve.

Steger, Pickering, Shin, and Dik (2010), in moderation-mediation analysis involving 242 highly religious and less religious college students, found support for

views of calling that centered on people's experience of meaning derived from their work more than from their religious views.

Raatikainen (1997) sought to clarify the relationship between calling and professional knowledge, nursing action, and motivation. Results from Raatikainen's survey of 179 registered nurses from five hospitals indicated that nurses who were committed to their profession and experienced their job as a calling were aware of the needs of dying patients and understood the importance of family ties. They also served as good sources of support for their patients. Raatikainen's results indicate that a calling is not in conflict with the professional principles of nursing.

Grounded in Leadership Theory

Terry Pearce, in his book *Leading out Loud* (2003), asked graduate students to identify leaders who were most effective at inspiring others. Their responses included Nelson Mandela, John F. Kennedy, Anwar Sadat, and others. These leaders, according to Pearce, could communicate with authenticity based on their values. "We use words like 'called' or 'fated' to describe the strength of their conviction, yet each of us has that calling, some louder than others..." (p. 22).

Solomon and Bowers (1981) described desired traits among leaders: strive to be valuable to humanity, be free of ulterior motives, refrain from keeping goals secret from followers, persevere, and be willing to sacrifice – attributes of a servant leader, and, potentially, a leader who has experienced a calling.

Kirkpatrick and Locke (1991) asked the question: Do traits matter among leaders? While exploring the question, Kirkpatrick and Locke first acknowledged the "great man"

leadership theories. These theories contend that leaders were born, not made. Trait leadership theories followed, which contended that leaders' characteristics are different from non-leaders. Although Stogdill (1948) refuted that a person who possessed specific traits was more apt to lead, Kirkpatrick and Locke (1991) replied that while traits, alone, do not guarantee leadership, they are preconditions to leadership. They included "drive," which includes energy, as one of six characteristics in which leaders differ from non-leaders.

Among the factors Stogdill (1948) found to be associated with leaders was responsibility, which was described, in part, as a desire to excel. Stogdill added that leadership can be situational, meaning that one may emerge as a leader in one situation, but not in others. The behaviors, according to Stogdill, are cemented in one's central being as an expression of needs to the point that he or she must strive to fulfill them. Hunter, Dik and Banning (2010) explored the definition of the construct of calling in their study of 295 college students. One focus of their study was the behavioral implications of calling, and four themes emerged. Among them were following a guiding force and displaying altruism – characteristics akin to calling. Displaying altruism, according to the authors, derived from participant answers that referred to helping others or impacting society positively. Responses also alluded to effortful dedication, referring to increased dedication and energy.

In a review of the literature to that point, Bird, (1940) listed the characteristics of emerging leaders, including enthusiasm and devotion to duty.

The concept of calling is scattered through the leadership literature, with references and connections. While discussing leadership and traits, Kirkpatrick and Locke

(1991) suggested that effective leaders must be full of drive and ambition, and they must want to lead others – a source of motivation that might come from a calling.

Other references – direct or indirect – to callings come from Bass and Steidlmeier (1999), when describing authentic transformational leadership – that this form of leadership comes from behavior that is “true to self and others” (p. 191). Stogdill (1948) included a sense of responsibility – which can come with a calling – while connecting personal dispositions with leadership. In his essay explaining the link between transformational and charismatic leadership, Hunt (1999) cited Chemers’ summary that referred to a leader’s “gift of grace” role (1997).

Robert Greenleaf, who is credited with first coining the term servant leadership, stated that a person’s vocation can be any legitimate calling that his or her talents justify (1998). What is important, according to Greenleaf, is choosing to use those talents to make society better – because so many leave it worse.

Wheeler (2011) began his list of the 10 principles of servant leadership by stating that service to others is the highest priority. “One of the strengths of a calling is that those called are willing to endure many setbacks or inconveniences because of their commitment to a higher purpose or goal” (p. 37).

The concept of callings has been found to be prevalent in the theory of servant leadership. Barbuto and Wheeler (2006), while developing an integrated construct of servant leadership, reported calling as one of its five subscales. Graham (1991) stated that servant leadership places an emphasis on social responsibility more than on the short-term performance of an organization. A servant leader must try to remove inequalities and social injustices. “The servant leader has a social responsibility to be

concerned with the have-nots and to recognize them as equal stakeholders in the life of the organization” (Northhouse, 2010, p. 385). In addition, “Servant leadership values everyone’s involvement in community life because it is within a community that one fully experiences respect, trust, and individual strength” (p. 385).

Beck (2010) listed role models as one of three antecedents of servant leadership. Wheeler (2011) wrote: “With those who expressed importance of role models, it seemed to be an osmotic process as they just observed and soaked up all the expectations, experiences, and behaviors of those exemplars” (p. 44).

Linenberger (2010), in his study of altruistic calling in the Orthodox Jewish community, found that rather than following an empathy-altruism path about those in need, participants described outcomes of helping situations with a high empathetic joy response.

Elangovan, Pinder, and McLean (2010), in their overview of the historical significance and nuances of callings, stated that the concept of callings sheds insight into the understanding of the range or organizational phenomena. Among their assertions:

--Work motivation: Callings prompt focused energy and guide a person’s choices for directing that energy. A person with a calling would be motivated to follow that calling by the value generated from achieving success.

--Job satisfaction: Experiencing a calling may put an individual in conflict regarding his or her level of satisfaction at work. Pursuing a calling means an individual is doing what he or she wants most of all. However, experiencing and following one’s calling may be all-consuming and a never-ending pursuit. “While one may draw tremendous satisfaction from pursuing one’s calling and be fully immersed in the

activities, he/she may also be plagued by a chronic sense of dissatisfaction prompted by what is not being achieved” (p. 436).

--Stress: Experiencing a calling orientation, rather than a job or career orientation, may reduce work-related stress because the individual may view it as a positive challenge while diverting attention away from potential failure.

--Increase of commitment: Those pursuing a calling are likely to increase their commitment to work. This escalation of commitment may result from the pursuit of the calling rather than the outcome. “Winning or succeeding may be seen as secondary to the actual doing for they feel compelled to answer the call regardless of the cost involved or the likelihood of success” (p. 436). In addition, they may overestimate the benefits connected to their effort, while underestimating the risks. “...the individual may assume that, given the inherent nobility of the goals and intentions involved, the ends may justify means that are costlier than what would normally be deemed acceptable” (p. 436).

--Organizational citizenship behavior: Because those with a calling associated with work are likely to make personal sacrifices at work, the distinction between work and life away from work becomes blurred. This convergence does not suggest they will work longer hours, but willingly engage in activities not within their normal job descriptions. This willingness to go beyond what is typically expected may be restricted to the parameters of the calling. Having employees with a “callings” focus may be a mixed bag because “these employees would be passionate about their work but not necessarily about the organization” (p. 437).

--Employee turnover: Organizations that try to generate a sense of calling among their employees must be prepared to provide work contexts that allow their employees to

pursue their callings. If employers fail to create their work environment, these employees may look elsewhere to pursue their calling. “When the mission and operations of the organization are aligned with the employee’s calling, the positive impact is likely to be enhanced and benefits mutually shared” (p. 437). If no such alignment exists, the employee may still try to pursue his or her calling despite the organization’s emphasis on other priorities. The employee may look for an organization that is more aligned with his or her calling.

Leadership, Calling, and Community

Leaders are influential – and they affect how and what things get done in a community (Chaskin, et al, 2001). The key is whose leadership skills are developed. The decision to develop new leaders can add vigor to a community, while presenting the possibility of new activities moving forward.

Human capital includes individual attributes that add to a person’s ability to earn a living, strengthen a community, and contribute to a community’s organizations (Flora, Flora, & Fey, 2004). Human capital’s relationship to strength and tenacity has diminished over time, giving way to interpersonal skills, values, and leadership capacity. “What values individuals hold and how they exercise leadership may determine whether they make a greater or lesser contribution to production, family, and community” (p. 81).

Nixon (1969) contended that community leaders can be classified along three dimensions: their formal positions and formal functions; their scope of influence; and their orientation.

Communities typically rely on what Morse (2004) calls the “usual suspects” (p. 185) – key businesspeople, well-known members of the clergy, and representatives from civic organizations, local hospitals, schools and charities. “We need all those people in addition to shop foremen, postal workers, police officers, stay-at-home parents, young people, senior citizens, and public housing residents, to name only a few” (p. 185). Basically, communities need everyone.

Communities can grow by cultivating people to enhance their prospects. Morse (2004) used an illumination described by Arendt (1968) to explain the process: “...is what happens when one person or a group of people can see through the fog of negative behavior, slim economic prospects, or compounded challenges to a way out and up” (p. 186).

Passion for change, as opposed to aggressiveness, may be the quality most needed to lead in communities (Luke, 1998). Those who can build consensus and act strategically when facing difficult challenges will be those who lead. “These leaders must have a passion for change but flexibility on how to get there” (p. 187).

Griffiths and Clemmer (2010) write that one way to kill a community is to prevent men and women 35 years or younger from leading. Residents in this age group are energetic, full of creativity, and have not been prejudiced by bad experiences or fruitless endeavors. “It is of critical importance, if you are going to kill your community, that you ensure those youth do not become engaged and active participants in community life” (p. 41).

Assessment

Barbuto and Wheeler (2006) developed an integrated construct of servant leadership, which includes five subscale items: emotional healing, persuasive mapping, wisdom, organizational stewardship, and altruistic calling. The authors defined altruistic calling as a “leader’s deep-rooted desire to make a positive difference in others’ lives. It is a generosity of the spirit consistent with a philanthropic purpose in life” (p. 318). Leaders high in altruistic calling, according to Barbuto and Wheeler (2006), will put others’ interest ahead of their own because their ultimate goal is to serve. They also will work diligently to meet followers’ needs.

Dreher, Holloway, and Schoenfelder (2007) developed the Vocation Identity Questionnaire, which includes nine items, to measure a person’s sense of calling. The instrument also measures the extent to which a person finds joy and meaning in his or her life’s work, which includes paid and unpaid occupations. According to Dreher, Holloway and Schoenfelder (2007), instrument criteria were based on Reformation descriptions of vocation, which was supported by studies on intrinsic motivation, flow, perceived significance, and work satisfaction. The authors reported that preliminary findings indicated high internal consistency and validity for the instrument.

Qualitative studies that focus on the role of calling and vocation are few (Hunter, Dik, & Banning, 2010). The authors cited work by Constantine, Miville, Warren, Gainor and Lewis-Cole (2006) that connected, through the study of African-American undergraduate students, the word “calling” and an approach to integrating spirituality and work. Two other qualitative studies (Oates, Hall, & Anderson, 2005; Sellers, et al., 2005) focused on multiple callings (motherhood and career) among Caucasian Christian

mothers working at an academic institution. In addition, Loder (2005) reported how a group of African-American women found meaning in their work despite feeling pushed toward that career because of oppressive societal norms.

This review of the literature regarding how to recognize when one is called determined that the previous work has distinguished callings from vocation, connected callings and work, and established how callings is connected to leadership theory, especially servant leadership. However, this review revealed that the literature remains largely void of insight on how to recognize when one is called.

Chapter 3

Methodology

This chapter describes the methods that were used in this study to explore how callings can be recognized and, when they are experienced simultaneously, how they can be managed. The primary method for this study was qualitative in nature because the purpose is to derive meaning from the participants' life experiences with callings, to develop themes, and then draw conclusions from those themes.

Qualitative Approach

The recognizable characteristics of qualitative research, based on the historical development of this approach to inquiry, are (Creswell, 2005):

- Recognition that researchers need to listen to the views of participants in their studies.

- Recognition that researchers need to ask open-ended, general questions, and collect data derived from their participants in their surroundings.

- Recognition that research can advocate for change and better people's lives.

In addition, Creswell (2005) states that when determining the approach of inquiry, research problems need "to be explored to obtain a deep understanding" (p. 54).

Silverman (2004) listed six assumptions that are grounded in qualitative research:

- The desire to go beyond a "cookbook" version of research methods (p. 1).

- A need to explore issues of language, representation, and social organization.

- A desire to find ways to generate links between social sciences traditions.

--The belief that a social science that discriminates between “fact and fancy” is a valid enterprise (p. 1).

--The assumption that qualitative research has accumulated a usable body of knowledge and no longer should be viewed as provisional.

--A commitment to dialogue between social sciences and the community.

Data gathered by investigators conducting qualitative research are detailed and guide the researchers’ interpretation and what they find to be meaningful (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006). “This qualitative approach to interpretation requires the researcher to tend to the text and spend time with the respondent’s words in order to construct a critical theme that is derived from the perspective of the respondent” (p. 8). The researcher takes the meaning that each respondent attaches to an experience, event, or circumstance, then identifies and defines typologies (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). Elements that give qualitative research its distinctive character include (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003):

--Learning about participants’ social and material circumstances, experiences, perspectives, and histories to gain an understanding of their social world.

--Creating participant pools that are small, but meet a salient criteria for inclusion.

--Gathering details, extensive and information data.

--Analyzing data in an approach that is open to emergent concepts and ideas.

--Producing outputs that focus on the interpretation of social meaning by representing the social world of the participants.

Creswell (1998) states that qualitative researchers approach their work with a world view, which he defined as a set of beliefs or assumptions that guide their work. These assumptions include the ontology issue (the nature of reality), the epistemological

issue (the relationship of the researcher to what is being studied), the axiological issue (the role values play in the study), the rhetorical (the language of the study), and the methodological issue (the process).

Table 1

Philosophical Assumptions with Implications for Practice

Assumption	Question	Characteristics	Implications for Practice
Ontological	What is the nature and themes	Reality is subjective and multiple, as seen by participants in the study	Researcher uses quotes and themes in words of participants and provides evidence of different perspectives
Epistemological	What is the relationship between the researcher and that being researched?	Researcher attempts to lessen distance between himself or herself and that being researched	Researcher collaborates, spends time in field with participants, and becomes a confidant
Axiological	What is the role of values?	Researcher acknowledges that research is value laden and that biases are present	Researcher openly discusses values that shape includes own interpretation in conjunction with interpretation of participants
Rhetorical	What is the language of research?	Researcher writes in a literary, informal style using the personal voice and uses qualitative terms and limited definitions	Researcher uses an engaging style of narrative, may use first-person pronouns, and employs the language of qualitative research
Methodological	What is the process?	Researcher uses inductive logic, studies the topic within its context, and uses an emerging design	Researcher works with details before generalizations, describes in detail the context of the study, and continually revises questions from experiences in the field

Note. Adapted from Creswell, J. W. (1998). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five traditions*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications. p. 15.

Qualitative Traditions

Creswell (1998) lists five qualitative traditions: narrative, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case study. The five traditions are listed in Table 2.

Table 2

Five Qualitative Traditions

Qualitative Tradition	Major Attributes
Narrative	Focuses on the story or stories of a single individual
Grounded theory	Extends beyond description and attempts to create new theory
Case study	Focuses on an issue through one or more cases within a finite system
Ethnography	Focuses on a cultural group, potentially over time
Phenomenology	Describes the experiences of a like group that relate to a central phenomenon

Note. Adapted from Creswell, J. W. (1998). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five traditions*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Phenomenology

I selected a phenomenological approach for this paper because participants in my study shared the common experience of receiving a calling, recognizing it, and responding to it. In some cases, participants had experienced – and recognized – multiple callings. A case study and narrative approach were discarded because of their more narrow focus. An ethnography tradition was appropriate to this line of inquiry, especially for follow-up study to track participants' callings over time and how they developed.

Finally, the results of this study could be incorporated into future research in the grounded theory approach to lead researchers to a “much more concrete reality” that anchors these efforts (Prasad, 2005, p.26). In this discipline, theory is generated through the analysis of data from interviews rather than observing individual practices (Addison 1989).

Phenomenology is an aspect of qualitative research that is more influential than might appear because of the smaller number of empirical studies that use it as their guiding theory (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005). Phenomenology’s roots date to the 18th century, in part, as a critique of positivism (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006).

Phenomenology is a philosophy and a research method for exploring the lived experiences of its participants involved in the phenomena of interest. Phenomenologists use a variety of methods, including observation, in-depth interviewing and examining written accounts of experiences found in such documents as diaries. Phenomenology is a theoretical perspective aimed at generating knowledge about how people experience things and then describe those experiences.

The phenomenological approach focuses on people’s unquestioned experience of their biological worlds, which is termed “life-world.” Each person’s life-world is different, and these actions must be put in context of the individual’s life-world (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005) – such as a mother who describes the anxiety and helplessness she feels when she believes she is called to be a parent, but is having difficulty getting pregnant.

Moustakas (1994) stated that the purpose of a phenomenological approach is to determine what the experience means for those who had the experience of study and are

able to describe it comprehensively. “From the individual descriptions general or universal meanings are derived, in other words the essences or structures of the experience” (p. 13).

The principle processes of phenomenological research (Moustakas, 1994) are illustrated by focusing on the appearance of things, being concerned with wholeness when “examining entities from many sides, angles, and perspectives” (p. 58), seeking meaning from appearances and determining the essences of the topic through intuition and reflection, being committed to descriptions of experiences, asking questions that give focus to meaning, and integrating subjects and objects. “In description one seeks to present in vivid and accurate terms, in complete terms, what appears in consciousness and in direct seeing...” (p. 59). The four processes of phenomenology (Moustakas, 1994) are listed in Table 3, along with the researcher’s approach to each.

Moustakas (1994) listed the methods and procedures to be taken when employing a phenomenological approach to inquiry. An explanation of each and the researcher’s approach to each step is included:

Methods of preparation. This component includes formulating the question, and illustrating the topic and question. The question must be clear and concise, and stated in concrete terms. Key words must be defined and discussed. “...the question grows out of an intense interest in a particular problem or topic. The researcher’s excitement and curiosity inspire the search” (p. 104). The researcher, who formulated his research question based on the approach used in previous work that used this tradition, used his revelation that he has not experience a calling as the impetus for his interest in the topic.

Table 3

Four Processes of Phenomenology

Process	Description	Researcher' Approach
Epoche	The researcher must eliminate suppositions. The researcher suspends judgment, sets aside preconceptions and prejudgments, and is receptive of unbiased consciousness.	The researcher approached the study without notions of what he would discover Through his interviews with participants.
Phenomenological Reduction	The researcher must describe what he or she sees externally and internally. This stage includes prereflection, reflection, and reduction geared toward drawing out the essential nature of the phenomenon.	Through the use of probe questions, the researcher drew out the life experiences of the participants and was able to pare the description given to succinctly state the phenomenon.
Imaginative Variation	The researcher describes the essential structure of a phenomenon. The researcher seeks meaning through the use of imagination, varying frames of reference, approaches from different perspectives, and different roles and functions. The goal is to be able to describe how the experience of the phenomenon came to be what it is.	Through the use of rich description of the participants' life experiences, and by asking multiple questions about specific topics, the researcher was able to understand how they recognized their callings.
Synthesis	The researcher intuitively integrates the textural and structural descriptions into a statement that represents the essence of the experience.	The research was able to describe how and why Participants were able to recognize their callings.

Note. Adapted from Moustakas, C. (1994). *Phenomenological research methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Open-ended questions, paired with probe questions, were implemented to draw rich descriptive statements from the participants.

Illustrating the topic and question, according to Moustakas (1994) includes the researcher's personal background and relationship to the topic, and locating and selecting

participants. Acknowledging the researcher's background and relationship to the topic involves expressing the motivation for the inquiry.

My motivation centers on my acknowledgement of never having experienced a calling. No predetermined criteria exist for locating and selecting participants. Beyond age, race and religion, factors are whether the research participant has experienced the phenomenon, is intensely interested in understanding its nature, and is willing to participate in a lengthy interview. The researcher explained the focus of his study to prospective participants and 12 of 14 residents of the Midwest community agreed to participate and expressed an interest in the topic.

Ethical principles. Aspects of ethical research allowing co-researchers to withdraw from the study at any time, allowing participants to withdraw, and allowing research participants to "review and confirm or alter the research data to correspond to her or his perception of the experience" (p. 110). No co-researchers were part of this study, and participants were reminded at the initial contact, at the beginning of the interview, and at its conclusion that they could withdraw at any point. Participants also were informed that they could contact the researcher at any point after the interview.

Validation of data. This component involves asking participants to carefully examine the description of the topic, allowing for additions and corrections. The themes discovered by the author also were verified by a researcher at the University of Nebraska at Omaha.

Review of the professional and research literature. "The investigator assesses the prior relevant studies; distinguishes their designs, methodologies, and findings from the investigator's own study; and indicates what new knowledge he or she is seeking and

expects to obtain” (p. 111). Moustakas (1994) describes the types of literature reviews, including the integrative review (Cooper, 1989), which presents the current status of knowledge relevant to the topic, which allow the researcher to draw conclusions from the many separate studies that address the topic of focus. An integrative review of the literature was conducted to determine gaps in research and to lay the foundation for selecting the most appropriate approach for conducting the study. The researcher discovered a slew of work that focused on callings, but little about recognizing them. Initially determined to be more appropriate as a narrative study, this approach was later discarded because a focus on the nature of a calling created a central phenomenon. In addition, focusing solely on a single participant was less conducive for establishing results that would transcend across the literature. The literature also allows for the use of nontechnical literature, including letters, biographies, diaries, and newspapers – although none of these types was employed by the researcher.

Methods of data collection. The phenomenological inquiry typically employs lengthy interviews, during which data are collected about the topic and research question. Phenomenological interviews are informal, interactive processes that engage open-ended questions and comments. Interviews typically cannot be scripted. “Although the primary researcher may in advance develop a series of questions aimed at evoking a comprehensive account of the person’s experience of the phenomenon, these are varied, altered, or not used at all when the co-researcher shares the full story of his or her experience of the bracketed question” (p. 114).

The interview typically begins with social conversation aimed at creating a relaxed environment for the interview. “The interviewer is responsible for creating a

climate in which the research participant will feel comfortable and will respond honestly and comprehensively” (p. 114). The researcher previously acknowledged his interest and background relating to the participants. Creating a question list ensured that the researcher didn’t allow his background to taint the participants’ responses or adapt them. Because of my background of coming from a similar-sized community in which the participants reside and my interest in the subject, I acknowledged my potential personal biases and bracketed my question, meaning I did not try to direct the conversation. After the pre-selection process was complete, I contacted potential candidates for initial interviews. A formal in-person interview time was established. Interviews were conducted in the participants’ homes, their place of business or in a public setting. Each participant either suggested the interview location or agreed to the researcher’s suggestion. Privacy was established in all interview venues, and participants indicated that they were comfortable with these interview venues when asked by the researcher.

General interview guide. Broad questions may facilitate obtaining rich, substantive descriptions of the participants’ experiences. “The language and timely way in which the questions are posed facilitates full disclosure of the co-researcher’s experience” (p. 116). A list of initial questions was developed, along with potential follow-up questions that were incorporated when needed to engage the participants in further expounding upon the answers.

Beginning an interview. Engaging in the “epoche” process involves the researcher setting aside past associations, facts and biases in order to avoid directing the interview. Following the epoche process may also be necessary during the interview. The researcher refrained from telling the participants his life story and the lack of calling

in his life. He also did not share his religious beliefs with those who professed to have a religious calling. Finally, he refrained from passing judgment on validity or perceived strength of the participants' callings.

Organization and analysis of the data. This process begins with the researcher reviewing the interview transcripts and following the procedures of phenomenal analysis. Following data collection, I followed these steps for organizing, analyzing, and synthesizing data: I developed individualized textural and structural descriptions, I established the essence of the study, I summarized the study, I related the findings to and differentiated them from the literature review, I related the findings to potential further research, I related the study to personal and professional outcomes, and I established my future goals.

The focus of this query was to determine how people recognize their various callings. Secondary foci were how they differentiate between their callings and react to them when they are in conflict, and how they ultimately are able to embrace them. By employing the use of open-ended questions that touch upon calling and listening to participant responses, I discovered themes from their life experiences. These themes formed the foundation for my study results. Finally, these findings may enable anyone who has or is experiencing callings to manage and embrace them with efficiency and passion.

Research Question

As previously stated, the central research question was: What are the experiences that led to feelings of strong commitment, or callings, in their lives?" From this

starting point, I added additional questions and addressed related topics:

1) What are the experiences in your life that led you to feel commitment (called) toward your profession? Your community? Your family? And your faith?

2) How did you respond to these callings (feelings of commitment) in your life? Did you embrace your callings or try to put them off?

3) What were these times (or experiences) like when you felt any of these callings (commitments) went hand in hand with others? How did you respond?

4) Do you view your callings as more of a blessing or a hindrance? Why?

Participant Screening

The researcher, while exploring how people recognized when they are called, sought participants who were likely to have experienced a calling. The researcher followed these steps in the selection process:

Community selection. The researcher asked for suggestions from an editor of a daily newspaper and an academician who works with communities throughout the state. They were asked to suggest communities with strong leadership, a strong sense of community, and a strong business sense. They were provided definitions of calling and an explanation of the focus of the researcher's study. They were also given optimal distance parameters, based on the researcher's place of residence, for selecting a research community. The academician suggested a Midwest community with which she is familiar. The newspaper editor (the author's brother) confirmed the selection.

Community leaders. The researcher asked community leaders to identify residents whom they believed possessed a calling. The community leaders – the mayor,

superintendent of schools, chamber of commerce president, and chamber of commerce executive director – were provided a definition of calling and explained how an individual might experience one in various aspects of his or her life.

Identification and verification. Once local leaders identified candidates, they were asked to complete a portion of the Servant Leadership Questionnaire that relates to altruistic calling. The Servant Leadership Questionnaire (Barbuto & Wheeler, 2006) consists of 23 items, five of which are devoted to the construct of altruistic calling:

--This person puts my interests ahead of his/her own.

--This person does everything he/she can to serve me.

--This person sacrifices his/her own interests to meet my needs.

--This person goes above and beyond the call of duty to meet my needs.

The four community leaders collectively identified 39 people who they believed potentially possessed a calling. Those prospects who were evaluated by the local leaders to be highest in strength of calling, according to the scores from The Servant Leadership Questionnaire, and those who were identified by more than one community leader as potentially possessing a calling were asked to participate in the study.

Request to participate. Two prospects were identified by more than one community leader. Both were approached. One of these prospects declined when his spouse indicated that he was too old to have a calling. The prospect agreed with his spouse. Another prospect, who was identified by a community leader as having a calling to serve her family, declined because she didn't want to sacrifice time away from her children to conduct an interview. Twelve other community residents – all identified by and ranked highest by the community leaders – were asked to participate and all 12

agreed. Candidates were pre-screened by the researcher via telephone. They were informed by the researcher that he was conducting a survey for his doctoral program and wished to interview them about the callings they possessed toward their profession, their community, their God, and their family. They also were asked to describe any other sense of commitment or passion they have in their lives. They were told their identity would be protected. They were told they could withdraw from the study at any time and had the right to ask questions about how it was being conducted.

Interview process. The researcher interviewed 12 community residents and, after analyzing the data, determined that he had reached emersion.

Data Analysis

Creswell (2005) identified steps needed for preparing and organizing data when using a qualitative approach:

- 1) Organizing the data – I kept of list of my participants and kept the files separate.
- 2) Transcribe the data – I transcribed the 12 interviews.
- 3) Analyze by Hand or Computer – I analyzed the data by hand, using a number system to distinguish between emerging themes.

I looked for commonality in the statements given by participants while creating groupings. Next, I constructed the experiential and contextual representations of those themes. The textural description summarizes the experiences (the “what”), while structural description summaries their context (the “how”). The textural and structural descriptions were fundamental in developing the themes of the results. Then, I compared

my interpretations and comparisons of the data to the literature. Finally, I determined, by comparing the transcripts and comparing their content, the essence of my study – that the connections participants felt, in many cases through relationships with others, were the impetus for their callings, which they described as life-changing experiences.

Validity

I engaged two forms of validation of my data: peer review and participant involvement. Dr. David Ogden, associate professor of communication at the University of Nebraska at Omaha, reviewed the transcripts of the 12 participant interviews. Dr. Ogden's blind review of transcripts from the 12 interviews of community residents with callings reinforced the author's discovery of five themes related to recognition of their callings, and multiple subthemes for each theme.

In addition, Megan – the stay-at-home mother – and Nicole – the educator – chosen randomly, reviewed the transcripts of their individual interviews and the initial themes that emerged from each. Each participant reported that the transcripts and the initial themes identified from her interview accurately represented her individual words and their meanings. These participants were asked to review the transcripts at the conclusion of the initial interview. They were emailed a transcript of their interview and asked to respond after their review.

Institutional Review Board Approval

The researcher received approval for this project from the Institutional Review Board at the University of Nebraska Lincoln on June 2, 2011.

Chapter 4

Findings

They weren't necessarily looking to be called to their community, their God, their family, but they were. But when they discovered they were called, participants in this phenomenological study found they couldn't ignore their callings. In fact, ultimately, they embraced them. How they recognized their calling is the focus of this study.

The environmentalist, referred to as Gary, was having difficulty describing how he knew he had a calling. He acknowledged that he did have a calling – although describing that calling was complicated. The calling, he explained, must have evolved over time with his growing interest in restoring prairie land in the Midwest. As for how he knew: “A calling is an interesting thing,” he said. “I think of it as you just know.”

Gary, the environmentalist, may have been the exception in this phenomenological study, the purpose of which was to describe how people recognize when they are called. The participants were 12 peer-suggested residents of a rural Midwestern community who were identified as possibly possessing a calling. Those who identified the eventual participants were given no restrictions of who they suggested, outside of the working definition of a calling used in this study. In the end, those identified acknowledged an openness to the possibility that they possessed a calling.

The central question for this study focused on how people recognize their callings, and how they manage them should they come in multiples. The sub-questions, or probes, were: (a) What are the experiences in your life that led you to feel a calling toward your profession? Your community? Your family? And your faith? (b) How did you respond to these callings, or feelings of commitment, in your life? Did you embrace

these feelings or try to put them off? (c) What were these times (or experiences) like when you felt any of these callings (commitments) went hand in hand with other callings? How did you respond? and (d) Do you view your callings as more of a blessing or a hindrance? Why?

Five themes emerged from the experiences of these Midwest residents with callings as shown in Figure 2 and Table 4: (a) the presence of a mentor in one's calling; (b) the call to service – be it to one's God, one's community or to help mankind – can be powerful and difficult to dismiss; (c) calls can come at a moment's notice; (d) rewards can be realized from answering a call – but they don't typically translate to dollars and cents, and (e) secular calls can come from religious ones.

The participants all acknowledged they had something in their lives for which they felt a deep commitment, which 10 participants described as a calling. Two participants, however, initially refrained from labeling this commitment as a calling. “I would not tell them I have a calling,” said Will, the retired educator. “This is what I would do: I would give examples of things that excite me.” For example, just the other day he took a candidate for the superintendent of schools on a tour of the community. “What's my goal there? I want them to want this job. That's an example of what I really do. That's what our community does. When our community does this, I think it helps other people get on board. I have a strong commitment to the community.” However, while discussing the deep commitments they felt in their lives, these two participants begin using the term “calling” as they discussed their lives and priorities.

Participants discussed how they realized they possessed a calling, including one participant who explained that he “just knew.”

Figure 2

“You just know” – Recognizing One’s Calling: A Summary of the Findings

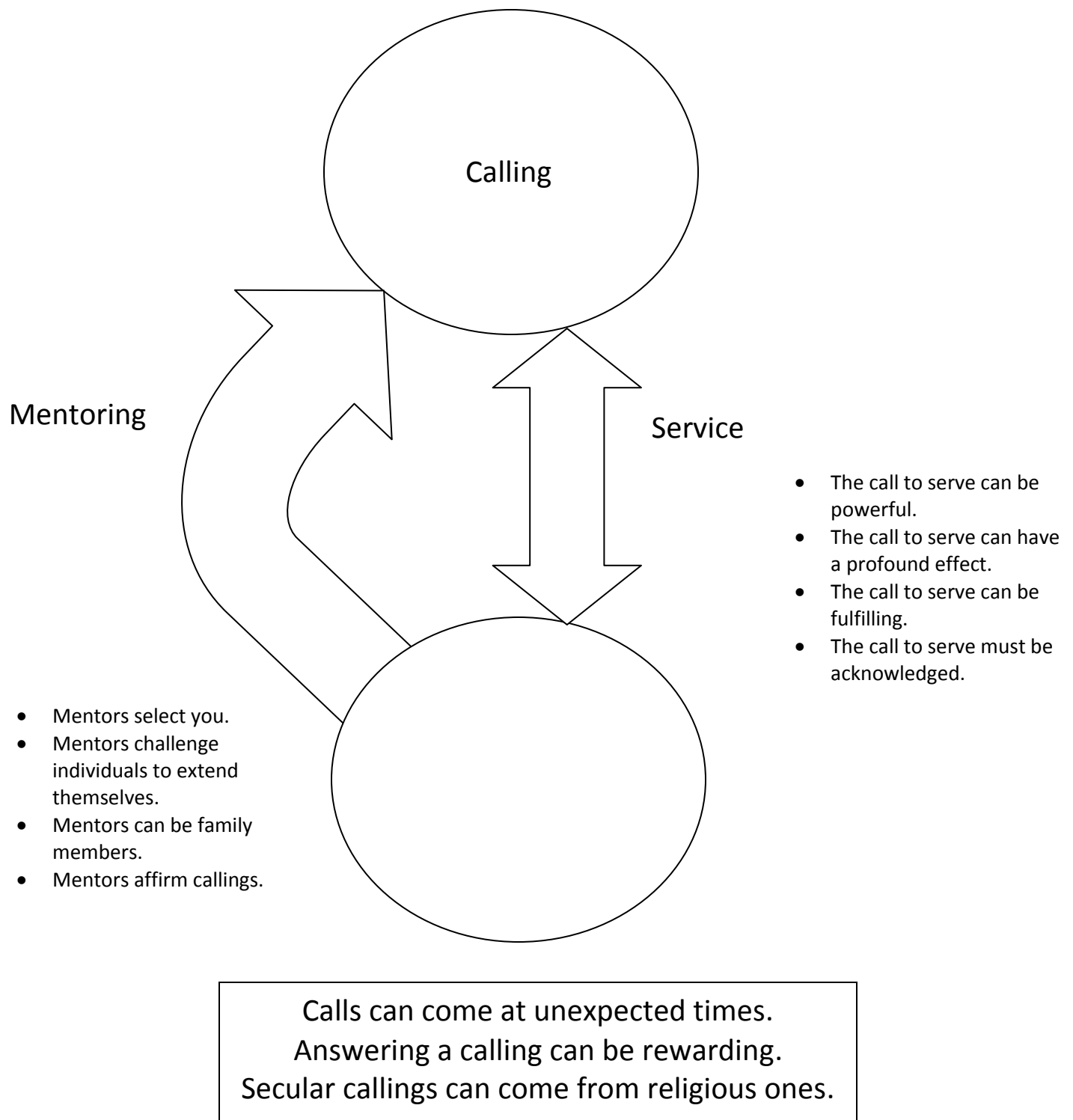


Table 4

Themes and Subthemes

The role of a mentor in one's calling: "You have to be asked and respond to being asked."

Several participants tied their callings to the influence that a mentor played in their lives. This mentor challenged them to answer their calling, without using the term during their interaction.

Mentors select you.

Mentors challenged participants to extend themselves.

Mentors can be family members, typically a parent.

Mentors, by serving as an example, affirm callings.

The call to service: "It just happened."

Several participants reported that they felt compelled to serve – their Lord, their community, their family. This urge to serve is difficult to dismiss, but typically results in a strong commitment.

The call to serve can be powerful.

The call to serve can have a profound effect on everyone involved.

The call to serve can be fulfilling.

The call to serve must be acknowledged.

The call to serve isn't always easy.

Calls can come at unexpected times.

Participants reported that they recognized their callings through interactions with role models and special moments. Some called them epiphanies.

Calls can be identified by signs.

Calls generate possibilities.

Answering a call can be rewarding – but those rewards aren't always obvious.

Participants stressed that they did not answer and respond to their calls in order to reap rewards. Callings, however, can be rewarding – but those rewards sometimes are unexpected and aren't always obvious.

Calls bring all types of rewards.

The rewards aren't always immediate.

Secular callings can come from a religious calling – "The call to spiritual living is the calling I have to live out as a Christian."

Several participants professed their devotion to their Lord Jesus Christ. Their religious callings spawned secular callings, and they feed from one another.

Religious and secular callings can co-exist

Religious and secular callings can, at times, be in conflict

Religious callings can spawn secular callings

Several participants suggested that their spiritual calling had spawned a call to serve others. The participants, in general, agreed that they viewed their callings as positive, and that their callings carried with them a sense of responsibility – even to the point of adding stress to their lives. One participant – Megan, the stay-at-home mother of five – acknowledged that her calling at times created stress in her life as she felt others in her community viewed her as a perfect parent, which she was careful to point out she was not.

Participants

The only connection between the participants was the community they called home – a rural community in the Midwest with a population of slightly more than 2,000 residents. This community, where manufacturing and retail are the two most prevalent industries, was suggested by the author's instructor in a class that focused on the communication process in communities and affirmed by the author's brother, a journalist in the state who was familiar with this community and its residents.

Because of the size of this community, the participants inevitably may know one another but – as their identities were kept confidential – they likely were unaware of who else was included in this study. Participants were asked to speak candidly about their life experiences and the things important to them. They were initially provided the definition of a calling and asked to describe important things in their lives and the commitment they felt toward them. Interviews lasted from 22 minutes to 56 minutes. At the end of the interviews, participants were asked if they had anything they wanted to add or clarify. They were given the opportunity to contact the author of this study if they wanted that

opportunity at a later time. They also were given the opportunity to withdraw at any time. Five of the participants were women and seven were men (Table 5). The age of the participants ranged from the early 30s to the 70s. Two participants were stay-at-home parents, while two others had previously retired from their professional careers. One participant operated a non-profit organization, while two owned their own businesses. One participant was a member of the clergy, and he and two others spoke of a spiritual calling tied to serving others. Attempts were made to work with a group of participants that included an equal distribution by gender and race, and a wide distribution of age. Seven participants expressed their belief in Jesus Christ as their savior. An even distribution of gender was nearly achieved as was a wide distribution of age. However, all participants included in this study were Caucasian as the residents of this community are mostly white. Serving as a community leader was not a prerequisite for participation in this study, although at least four were serving in that capacity – formally or informally. Table 5 includes a description of each participant and lists the pseudonym given to each, as keeping the identity of the participants in this study was a stipulation of receiving approval by the Institutional Review Board at the University of Nebraska Lincoln.

Table 5

Participant List

Participant	Gender	Description	Calling Type
Brenda	Female	Business owner, community leader	Community (service)
Frank	Male	Business leader, community leader	Community, religious
Megan	Female	Stay-at-home mother	Religious, family
Julie	Female	Stay-at-home foster mother	Family
Matthew	Male	Pastor	Religious, service
Randy	Male	Retired farmer, business man	Service, religious
Nicole	Female	Educator	Education
Jenny	Female	Business owner	Religious
James	Male	Retired educator, public servant	Religious, community
David	Male	Former business owner, humanitarian	Service
Will	Male	Retired educator	Service
Gary	Male	Environmentalist	Service, environment

Twelve residents of a rural Midwest community discussed the callings they felt in their lives, and how they recognized when they were called. The experiences they discussed led to the formation of five themes, which are now described.

Theme: “You have to be asked and respond to being asked”

Sometimes, according to Levoy (1997) finding one’s calling means finding a way to reduce the background noise, or distractions. Sometimes, that means listening to the people in your lives. Brenda, the business owner and community leader, acknowledged that her father, who served the same role in her community, had a vast influence on her life. For a time, she rebelled. She wanted out of the community because living there

carried too much baggage. Too many expectations. This life was stifling. But she returned. Her father had something to do with it. She later realized that her father's approach to service meant stepping away from what is best for oneself and putting the needs of others first. So she adapted another approach to her life: one of community service. After years of following her father's lead, the business owner acknowledged that it has become a way of life. It was her calling.

Her father didn't restrict his focus on his community to his daughter. He had a habit of reaching out to those whom he thought had potential, and challenged them to get involved in their community. "My dad and his generation – they mentored the next generation and then we're mentoring the next generation down," she explained. She felt an obligation, she explained. "Another part is you have to be asked and respond to being asked."

Brenda, the business owner and community leader, wasn't the only one to tie her calling to a mentor. A second business leader and community leader, Frank, attributes his calling to serve his community to the same mentor. Will, a retired educator, also mentioned this same man and the influence he had on his life, but more so their community. James, the retired educator and public servant, attributes his calling to a high school vocational education instructor who challenged him to lead – and set him up in situations in which he could lead. David, the former business owner who makes humanitarian trips to a Third-World country, attributes his calling to the man who founded the organization that digs water wells in that country. This man, although now elderly, still serves this organization and still serves as an inspiration to the participant.

Stone (2004) traces the concept of mentoring to the Old Testament book of Proverbs, but lists the origin of the term, which in Greek means to counsel, to Homer's *The Odyssey*. According to the definition, the mentor offers support, guidance and assistance to the mentee during a difficult period. In the epic poem, Mentor was an Ithacan noble and trusted friend of Odysseus. Mentor was entrusted to guide, protect, and teach Odysseus's son. Later, the goddess Athena assumed this role. "In this role, Mentor (and Athena) serve as coach, teacher, guardian, protector, and kindly parent" (Johnson & Ridley, 2004, p. xv). Mentoring is no fad. "It is a well-researched helping relationship. Mentoring is associated with positive personal career outcomes" (p. xv).

The four participants in this study who tied their calling to a mentor did not express that their calling came during an especially difficult time in their lives. Only one participant, Brenda – the business owner and community leader – acknowledged having experienced times when she felt the desire to be away from her community, but didn't necessarily describe these times as difficult.

According to the definition, a mentor also helps the mentee face new challenges and solve problems. Throughout history, mentoring has occurred in religious orders, medicine, law, and politics. In organizations, Stone (2004) sees two versions of mentoring: "Just as in the far away past informal mentoring occurred in any community, so it continues to occur in almost every organization" (p. xii). The concepts of supervision and mentoring are nearly interchangeable, with the focus to help the mentee as what distinguishes the latter from the former (Gold & Roth, 1999).

Clawson (1980) indicated that the notion of having someone to professionally guide and counsel another has been the popular focus of research and discussion since the

mid-1970s. For the mentee, the benefits of entering into a relationship with a mentor are increased confidence due to personal achievement, being challenged with new goals and targets, and having others show appreciation for your achievement.

The four participants in this study who tied their callings to having a mentor gave no indication that their motivation was to receive appreciation or acknowledgment of their efforts. In fact, the words they used to describe their callings would indicate that the participants (mentees) preferred to remain unrecognized for their efforts. Frank, the business leader and community leader, said his motivation for serving his community at his mentor's direction wasn't to receive anything tangible. "It dawned on me that why I was doing some of this (serving his community). The real reason to do it was not to get another legal client and make \$1,000 bucks. ...If you are really called to do something – I think this is true of an outstanding leader – you get to places where you can't rationalize the level or effort that you put into something. You can't logically paint the picture. The only thing that puts you through, it's good for the community. It's good for the people. You know what? I'm going to see it through." James, the retired educator and public servant, talked of how he would know when it was time to stop being mayor. When asked how he would react if his leadership role in the community were to be taken away following a vote of his peers, he said: "It does cross my mind ... I evaluate my role in the community by always going back to say don't overstay your welcome. Leave when they still say you've got good years left. You've got good ideas left." The participants who tied their callings to a mentor did express satisfaction of knowing they were challenged to better their community. They did not acknowledge increased confidence in

their lives, although the author of this study found them to be confident, in general, about their place in life and the roles they served in their community.

The Henley Focus Group Model of Mentoring (Cranwell-Ward, Bossons & Gover, 2004) is based on two axes: one that examines whether the mentoring relationship is structured or unstructured, while the other looks at whether the relationship is formal or informal. One of four mentoring characteristics – embedded, ad hoc, social, or self-help – is then placed in each of the four areas created by the two axes (Figure 3).

Participants – especially the two community leaders (Brenda and Frank), the retired educator and public servant (James) and the former business owner and humanitarian (David) – described their mentoring relationships in ways that would place them along the informal axis, and predominantly in the “social” category. “Both informal and unstructured, this type of mentoring is driven by the learner and goes largely unrecognized as being ‘mentoring’ ... It occurs on a haphazard, needs-driven basis” (p. 28).

All four participants were not seeking a mentor when theirs was found. And all four did not view their relationship with their mentor in that capacity. Instead, they viewed themselves as being tutored by a person they respected. They decided to follow his advice and guidance, and the result was a mentoring relationship that they still value

Figure 3

The Henley Focus Group Model of Mentoring

	Informal	Formal
Structured	Self-help	Embedded
Unstructured	Social	Ad hoc

Note. Adapted from Cranwell-Ward, J., Bossons, P., & Gover, S. (2004). *Mentoring: A Henley review of best practice*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.

years after their mentors are no longer living, but still play an influential role in their lives. Basically, participants' mentors are still serving to challenge their mentees.

Table 6

Theme: "You have to be asked and respond to being asked" – the role of a mentor in one's calling.

Mentors select you.

Mentors challenged participants to extend themselves.

Mentors can be family members, typically a parent.

Mentors, by serving as an example, affirm callings.

Mentors select you. Frank, the community leader, recalls the exact interstate mile marker – 342 – at which he received his calling. It came during a conversation with a longtime business owner and leader in his community who would later serve as his mentor. His mentor’s goal: Get him to work to improve his community. The two were traveling on the interstate after attending a meeting at which his future mentor had challenged him to get involved in his community. “I always remember he kind of walked through it – why you work to develop your community. He came back to the end: It boils down to the boys and girls. Making sure they have employment opportunities.” This encounter began well beyond the first stage – the first meeting – in the four-stage model of mentoring adopted by Whittaker and Cartwright (2000). Their encounter likely ended in the third stage – learning and incorporating change. The fourth stage – completing – would soon come as Frank became entrenched in community service.

James, the public servant and retired educator, who explained that he has had three callings in his life (to live, to educate and to lead), realizes his high school agricultural education instructor saw something in him – something he was unaware existed in him. “(Name omitted) was the person who saw in me the potential to do other things... I think clearly his message, his confidence, was the benchmark on which I had to live because his vision was so much higher than mine.” The public servant admits he was oblivious at the time to his instructor’s effort to set him up to lead. “(Name omitted) put me in a position in FFA (Future Farmers of America) to fulfill some aspects of leadership that I barely passed because I didn’t know how important these things were.”

David, the local humanitarian, said he couldn’t help but listen to the man who had retired from the well-drilling business and had taken up golf as therapy, but couldn’t stay

idle. The man agreed to dig wells in Haiti and later formed a nonprofit organization that helped bring potable water to areas in Haiti that had none. The local humanitarian accepted a friend's invitation to hear the man speak about his charitable organization. He figured he had nothing to lose by listening to the man. "This man is a plain and simple man...He said here's what we do. Here's why we do it." During the same meeting, his friend quoted scripture about how, if someone is blessed and sees someone in need – but doesn't do anything to help this person, what good is one's faith? "That was the challenge my friend handed me. Stop and think about it for a minute. That's quite a challenge." David, the local humanitarian, accepted the challenge. Twenty-five years later, the man who started the organization is still involved and still serves as a mentor to the local humanitarian. "I saw a man who knew that there's no possible way that he could solve all the problems the Haitians had. But I also saw a man who wasn't going to give up trying."

Johnson and Ridley (2004) compare selecting a mentee to making investments with limited resources. Mentors must look to make good matches that will result in a return of their investment. The four participants (Frank, James, David, and Will) said they realize their mentors invested in them – and worked to live up to the expectations set by their mentors. "Successful mentors are vigilant and discerning of the traits, talents, and interests of their junior personnel and careful to embark on mentorships only with those who match them well" (p. 3).

Mentors also must realize they cannot mentor everyone because they typically have limited time and resources to offer. Mentoring takes time, emotional energy, and professional resources. The two community leaders (Brenda and Frank) marveled at the

time and energy expended by their mentor. This man often put their development as community leaders ahead of his own business pursuits. “I found he had the same service mentality,” said Frank, the business leader and community leader.

Johnson and Ridley (2004) question what happens when mentors fail to be selective when making matches: the mentor diminishes the power of the mentoring relationship and risks becoming exhausted, detached, emotionally muted, and cynical. Those who commented about the community leader who served as a mentor to many never hinted that the man ever questioned the return on his investment of time. The man continued to cheerlead for his community throughout his life. Although the motivation and reasoning behind their mentors selecting them specifically are outside the scope of this study, the three participants who tied their calling to their mentors expressed their appreciation for being selected. In all cases, the three participants also expressed initial surprise and a hint of self-doubt for their selection. “He had a vision for me that I didn’t even know yet. Many times he acted that out because he believed in me enough – as I believed in him enough,” said James, the retired educator and public servant. Frank, the business and community leader, added: “I always thought he (his mentor, the community cheerleader) picked me out of a crowd to move me along.”

In her instructional guide to mentees, Lois Zachary (2009) listed the necessary qualities for a successful mentoring relationship: reciprocity, learning, a relationship, a partnership, collaboration, mutually defined goals and development. The author states that the focus in a mentoring relationship is on the future – developing the mentee’s skills, knowledge, abilities, and thinking – to help mentees progress in their personal or professional development. Although the selection process can be instigated by the

mentor or the mentee, the participants in this study were selected by the person who would eventually serve as their mentors.

In all cases, the participants who credit mentors for their callings – the community leader, the public servant, the humanitarian, and the retired educator (Frank, James, David, and Will) – state that their mentors challenged them to look forward and to develop the skills they would need to meet those challenges. “I think his message, his confidence was the benchmark on which I had to live – because his was so much higher for me,” said James, public servant and retired educator.

The four participants reported that their mentors remained positive and upbeat during their interactions. Their mentors served as inspirational roles models, and none mentioned experiencing a negative interaction with their mentors. According to Johnson and Ridley (2004), mentors who fail to be selective in their choices for mentees risk jeopardizing the relationship and the experience for the mentee. The authors then stipulate what qualities a mentor should seek in a mentee: ambition, initiative, intelligence, emotional stability and loyalty. As the mindset of those who served as mentors to participants in this study is not part of this study, the participants, at the very least, have displayed loyalty to their community as they continue to place value to donating time and resources to its betterment. James, the retired educator and public servant, speculated that his vocational agriculture teacher saw something in him – qualities that had yet to be tapped. The qualities of ambition and initiative emerged after their mentoring relationship had faded – the participant served as a leader in the military during the Vietnam War, emerged as a leader in his community, and devoted a portion of his life to educating youths. “There’s 10 years where his calling (to me) always inspired

me to go back to teaching and, I think, clearly his message, his confidence, was the benchmark on which I had to live.”

Finally, Johnson and Ridley (2004) compare a mentoring relationship to a marriage. “As in a marriage, the freedom to choose for both the mentor and protégé provides grounding for mutual commitment and satisfaction” (p. 4). While the authors compare a mentoring relationship to a marriage, the participants might not have even realized they were on a first date when they first encountered their future mentors. The retired educator and public servant (James) said his mentor’s inspiration for his life didn’t immediately stick. “I went to college for two years, flunked out, went to the military for one year...” Only after he sustained a near-fatal wound in the Vietnam War did the participant start to follow his mentor’s path. “I went back to college and started over.” Years later when he retired as an educator, James acknowledged the influence his mentor had years after his death. “He died before I became the teacher I became. When I retired, I said to the assembled group, I wish Mr. (name withheld) was here today to see what he inspired. What he created because much of what I am today goes back to the four years of mentoring.”

The relationship between David, the former business owner and humanitarian, and his mentor, the man who created the nonprofit organization, might be more difficult to assess. Their time together is limited by geography and the mentor’s advanced age. Their relationship might be more adequately described as inspirational, rather than in the context of a marriage. “I saw a man who knew that there’s no possible way that he could solve all the problems the Haitians had. But I also saw a man who wasn’t going to give

up trying. ...I had to realize I was called to do something, to share something, to give something, to be something to somebody else.”

Mentors challenged participants to extend themselves. According to Stone (2004), a mentee, in the work environment, can benefit from a mentor’s 1) knowledge and skills; 2) coaching, advice, guidance, and support; 3) understanding of organizational culture and politics; 4) new opportunities and contacts; and 5) greater career success. Mentors, according to Stone, achieve this by, among other things, setting high expectations. James, the retired educator and public servant, recalled that his mentor provided him with opportunities in which he could lead that progressively grew more challenging. Any expectations went unsaid, but the implication was that the participant should not accept his fate of underachievement that he believed already was sealed.

So too were the expectations set for Frank, the business leader and community leader, by his mentor. The participant said the mathematics didn’t add up as he tried to justify the time commitment he realized he would be making to serve his community – at his mentor’s urging. “You can’t add it up. It’s trust. You can’t say 2 and 2 makes 4. You can’t see that. ...It’s as I describe now, and I’ve told my sons this: I’ve been fortunate because it’s become intertwined with my whole career. My whole way of living. It’s not a separate civic duty. I come to work in the morning and there’s no separate civic function. It all comes together.”

Mentors, through their behavior, their words, and how they say the words they use, challenge their mentees (Megginson & Clutterbuck, 1995). “Mentors do not challenge by bullying. They do it by opening up the big questions, not in a generalized

and portentous way, but by attending closely to what is going on for the learner and dealing with the demanding issues when they appear” (p. 231).

On one level, David, the humanitarian, was called by his mentor to dig wells in Haiti – a sacrifice of time, treasure and personal comfort. On a higher level, the humanitarian was called by his mentor to look beyond his personal comfort and improve society. David could have refused his calling, continued to focus on his business and retired in comfort. Instead, he has sold the business, but continues to work while planning his next trip to Haiti. The humanitarian explained that once he got past his self-doubt, he realized he was meant to dig wells in Haiti – and his mentor helped him realize this. “You send a donation, he writes a personal thank-you note at 91. He answers every donation.”

The retired educator and public servant (James) also felt compelled to push himself – although this compulsion, he reported, came years after his mentoring experience with his vocational education instructor. The instructor challenged his student, the public servant recalled, in small ways that – years later – served as an impetus for his motivation to lead, serve, and teach. “I think (name omitted) called me to my profession. He inspired me and I lived out that calling for the first 10 years. ...There’s 10 years where his calling always inspired me to go back to teaching and I think clearly his message, his confidence, was the benchmark on which I had to live.”

Finally, Frank, the business leader and community leader, was encouraged by his mentor to better his community. The expectations came during what the participant calls his “conversion moment at mile-marker 342.” The participant was presented with a challenge to better his community and had the opportunity to decline. He chose to accept

the challenge to step up his community involvement, and continued to rationalize his decision long after the encounter with his mentor. Although he couldn't always justify his decision, he never wavered in his resolve. The choice of setting the mentor chose to have the conversation about community betterment proves interesting – private and without opportunity to escape. Initiative and ambition – desired qualities sought in mentees – also were displayed by the man who would serve as mentor.

Mentors can be family members, typically a parent. Participants explained their parents played a pivotal role in their calling. Although they may not have labeled their parents as mentors, the words they used to describe their relationships with them would indicate otherwise. Jenny, the business owner with a religious calling, described a conversation she once had with a counselor: What a girl thinks about herself and what a girl thinks her father believes about her when she's in her pre-teenage years makes a difference for the rest of her life, the counselor told her. "If she's affirmed at those ages. He looked at me: 'You had a dad who believed in you.' I said 'yep.'"

The business leader who embraced community service (Frank) recalled how his parents often would remark how blessed they were. "They were masters of serving their Lord, serving their community, serving their family. I've learned from them. I watched them. They never worried too much about what they had." The participant recalled, as a youngster, how he was counting the collection from a fellowship offering. People typically gave \$1, \$2 at the most. While counting, he noticed a \$5 check given by a wealthy professional in the community. He commented about the generosity to his father, who was in the room. "My dad didn't say much. I hadn't seen my dad's check yet. I knew the guy made three or four times as much as my dad. I didn't know the

details. I watched my parents. It wasn't just financial. It was more giving of time and service and everything else. It was just their level of happiness was something else. I'm sure that got me started."

The retired farmer and businessman (Randy) credits his parents and his grandparents for his commitment to his Lord, which led to a commitment to service. "My parents were in the church. My family was just a strategic part of it. It wasn't just that our family was a part of it. I can't explain it very well. I was committed to the Lord."

The educator (Nicole) explained how her parents – "they both came from a very – what I call a tragic background" – served as an example for her through their missed opportunities and the sacrifices they made. Family came first. Her father was a railroad man who missed his calling. "His passion was to be a teacher and a coach. He didn't do it because they didn't have the resources for him to do that. He got a job at the railroad and had good benefits. He didn't enjoy it. I watched him for a lifetime. He would have been an amazing coach."

Nicole didn't refer to her parents – especially her father – as mentors, but her description of their relationship indicates they served in that role. Her parents were supportive – but not blindly supportive. "They were also a family that did not say you can be whatever you wanted to be. I wanted to learn how to play the piano and I wanted to be in 4-H. They said 'No. You pick one.'"

Mentors and mentees should follow basic guidelines when forming their relationship (Murray 2001). Agreement on the nature of the relationship is key. Some mentors serve as role models, while others merely observe their mentees' behavior and

provide feedback. On a higher level, the mentor serves as a guide while preparing the mentee for a role or task. The mentor also demonstrates the desired behavior. Nicole's parents modeled for their daughter the importance of education. "We never drove through a town – if a town had a college, we drove by it. I always knew that I was going to continue my education. They didn't put pressure on me for grades. It was: This is your report card. What mattered to my parents was that I was doing something I wanted to do. That piece was always present."

The vocational education instructor, who served as a mentor for the retired educator and public servant (James), guided the participant and challenged him with tasks that would force him to practice his leadership skills. Agreement, however, wasn't a part of this mentor-mentee relationship, in all likelihood because the relationship was one between a teacher and his student in which agreement isn't expected nor required.

Agreement appeared to be assumed with Frank, the business leader who experienced his conversion to community service with the longtime community leader. The participant reported listening as his future mentor gave his pitch about community involvement. No pressure. No pleading. Just the facts and a strong case for the value of community service.

Mentors, by serving as an example, affirm callings. Megginson and Clutterbuck (1995), while examining future trends in mentoring, speculated that mentoring flourishes when it is allowed to grow organically, especially through processes of affiliation and support that develop between people.

The two business leaders with penchants for public service (Brenda and Frank) watched the role their mentor played in the community. He put his community before his

personal business. He encouraged others to follow his example by working to better his community. He shared what he had with others. The retired educator (Will) recalled that this man offered to pay for any student who could not afford to attend Future Business Leaders of America state or national conferences. “He told me, ‘I will come up with the money and no one will know.’ You see what I’m saying. When he goes to that level, I have to do something.” The inspiration, the participant described, came by example.

Will, the retired educator, explained further the impact this man had in this community – similar accounts were collaborated by the two community leaders. “It was probably ’85 or ’86 when (name omitted) called me and said I want to visit with you. At the time, I was coaching middle school basketball and I liked him a lot. He’s for the community. I didn’t change after practice. It’s already quarter after six. He said ‘I didn’t mean you had to come right down.’ He wanted me to be on the Hospital Board. Why? Because of the example he set. ...He was a role model for many of our powerful people – and I’m not one of them.”

The vocational education instructor, who served as a mentor for James, took a subtle approach to affirming his calling. “He showed me an opportunity to act out in a certain way. ‘You can do this. Just do what I tell you.’ It wasn’t bossy. I wouldn’t say he challenged me. He just opened a door I hadn’t dreamed of opening. I had no worldly knowledge of the world I know today.”

James, the public servant, said he paid homage to his mentor when he retired as an educator. He told those attending a retirement gathering that he wished his mentor could attend “to see what he inspired. What he created because much of what I am today goes back to the four years of mentoring – so I do use the mentoring. The root of it was

he gave me the vision of what was out there in the world because I grew up on a dirt-poor farm with little or no vision about the real world...He inspired me to have that education. He inspired me to have those goals. He inspired me to seek and find a path that was consistent with mine within the framework he gave.”

Theme: The call to service: “It just happened”

Barbuto and Wheeler (2006) linked the concept of callings and servant leadership while developing an integrated construct of the theory. They reported that “calling” was one of five subscales of servant leadership. The servant-leader is servant first (Greenleaf, 2003), which begins with the desire to serve. “Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead” (p. 13). The test: Do those being served become healthier, wiser, and more autonomous? Are they more likely to become servants?

Answering the call to service requires one to ask “Who am I?” and continue to ask the question until all the layers of one’s self are stripped away and the true self is revealed (Spears & Lawrence, 2004). “When the call of service calls your name, how will you respond?” (p. 224). James, the retired educator and public servant, answered this question throughout his life. The first opportunity came in the makeshift military chapel where he accepted Jesus Christ as his savior. “I heard an external voice that told me I chose not to die.” His conversion brought him a sense of peace. “I really believe that I was going to physically die probably because that was the outcome of battle. But I did not believe I was dead in the Christian sense of dying to hell. I was dying to heaven, which was living. When I realized when I could make the choice between dying and living in the worldly sense – coming back to the world – that was the choice I wanted to

make. That I had the privilege to make. That is my perception of how it happened. I acted it out – both word and deed. I had people 35, 40 years later, whatever you had that day, I wanted. They converted to Christianity and reported back to me.”

Before she devoted her life to serving her community, the business owner (Brenda), for a time, wanted nothing to do with that community. She couldn't picture herself living her parents' lives. She would run away to the nearby large community and live without the pressures of service. “I wasn't thinking real clearly at the time. ... We were never a vacation-time family. It was always business before pleasure. That was the mode we grew up in. I told him early on, motels were a little slow-paced for my life. I didn't think I wanted to be tied down to a toilet paper run.” She returned and her indoctrination into her community soon began. One of her first lessons was working with another business owner, who had a vision of encouraging the community's youth to return to their roots. His solution: annual alumni reunions that now draw crowds. “You work your butt off and take a lot of complaints. But in the end, it's a good thing.” And in the end, the business owner became a servant leader who placed her community ahead of herself.

Greenleaf (2003) described servant-leadership as a state of mind. It remains conceptual until it is applied. “It is at once an art and a calling. Servant-leadership is transformative because it reorders the manner in which people view themselves in relation to the world. ... Its power is discovered in the crucible of real-life experiences that include mistakes and losses as well as right actions and victories. Its rewards remain undiscovered until they are experienced” (p. 11).

Several participants, including the pastor (Matthew), described their callings as one to serve others. “The calling would be more to service than to position. That has been one of our denomination’s definitions – more to servant leadership. You are not called to be a higher-up in terms of the way the world sees me. You are called to be the servant.” Matthew explained his calling: “You have to serve before you can lead, but leadership ... that’s a constant challenge because the inclination is always to gain prestige. ... I think I would be called to serve the church ... That would be the primary call. Not exclusively. It would be to serve the members of this church. That would be my primary responsibility, realizing it would be that the church is to serve the world – in the name of the Lord.”

At its core, servant leadership is a long-term, transformational approach to life and work, according to Greenleaf (2003). It is “a way of being – that has the potential for creating positive change throughout our society” (p. 16). Brenda, the community leader and business owner, can’t pinpoint the moment when she felt called to serve. “It just happened. You just get involved with little jobs and you get bigger jobs. Then, you’re in a leadership role.”

The other business leader (Frank) with a penchant for service saw his life transformed during his conversion conversation with the man who would become his mentor. Although that conversation occurred decades ago, his new approach to service and living has become ingrained in his being.

Table 7

Theme: The call to service: “It just happened.”

The call to serve can be powerful.

The call to serve can have a profound effect on everyone involved.

The call to serve can be fulfilling.

The call to serve must be acknowledged.

The call to serve can be powerful. Greenleaf (1996) states that most people do not try to avoid their obligations. They will accept stress, trouble and confusion. “But they have a sharp need to learn to cope better with their circumstances, to feel more adequate with their total obligations” (p. 21). This is part of their call to serve.

Several participants related the powerfulness of their call. Randy, the retired farmer and business man, connects his calling to serve his congregation to a near-death experience when he rolled his pickup truck on a rural road. He was hurrying to town because he was late for a meeting. “I was thrown out of the vehicle and the vehicle landed on top of me in the ditch. I was compressed in the ... it was wet because of irrigation. I shouldn’t have made it through that.” The accident caused him to pause. “I shouldn’t have lived through that. I must say that gave me new focus. There’s a reason I am still here and I need to find it.”

Perhaps, the retired educator and public servant (James) experienced the most powerful callings as he prayed while visiting a military chapel while on active duty in Vietnam. His calling, he discovered after sustaining a near-fatal wound in battle, was to live. Others noticed a difference, he recalled. “Literally, I had people coming up to me

and saying ‘What do you have that I don’t have? You’re different from yesterday. It was very dramatic.’”

The two community leaders and the retired educator (Brenda, Frank and James), when describing how they received their callings through their mentors, talked about how he convinced them to become involved in their community. Persuasion is another of the 10 characteristics of the servant leader (Greenleaf, 2003). Persuasion does not mean using one’s positional authority while making decisions within an organization. “The servant-leader seeks to convince others, rather than coerce compliance. This particular element offers one of the clearest distinctions between the traditional authoritarian model and that of servant-leadership” (p. 18).

The participants also described how their mentors made them feel accepted. Greenleaf (1996), while discussing the truly great leaders he has encountered, described them as accepting of others. “Because their followers felt accepted, they tended to perform beyond the limits they had set for themselves. Initially, they may have excelled to please their leader but eventually they did so to please themselves” (p. 310).

Greenleaf’s words describe the retired educator and public servant’s response to his vocational education instructor’s challenge. James acknowledges that he achieved more than he ever imagined. He fully expected to fulfill what he thought was his destiny: “...the classic you’re so dumb, you’re going to pump gas for the co-op, which was the most demeaning thing. ...The root of it was he gave me a vista of what was out there in the world because I grew up on a dirt-poor farm with little or no vision about the real world. I didn’t have a myriad of friends, didn’t have this political connection. I was the lowest of the low.”

Will, the retired educator, described when he was summoned to serve his community – by the man who had mentored many in the community. Their meeting was to occur after Will finished basketball practice with his middle-school team. Instead of going home to change following practice, Will went straight to the meeting. “He said I didn’t mean you had to come right down. He wanted me to be on the hospital board. Why, because of the example he set.”

The call to serve can have a profound effect on everyone involved. Greenleaf suggested that the best way to determine the positive effect of the servant leader is to ask: Do those served grow as people? Do they become healthier, wiser and more autonomous? Are they more likely to become servant leaders themselves? (Frick, 2004).

The retired farmer and business man’s (Randy) calling to serve his congregation was tested several years ago when a schism in the congregation caused about one-third of its members to leave. “I just felt like that was maybe why God kept me here because I was real instrumental getting through that. ... Today, I would say over one-half have come back. That doesn’t happen. When people leave with their pride, they can’t come back. For the last three years, that’s been one of my focuses. We don’t beg anybody, but we welcome them. We try to resolve any issues – I’ve been a part of that.”

“In fact, my three o’clock meeting is with one of the guys who left the church. We’re going to have a Coke.”

Part of Will’s service was to his students, especially those involved with the Future Business Leaders of America. Will, the retired educator, proclaimed that he was blessed to have outstanding students. “I believe in the saying that if you surround yourself with good people, you don’t have to be too good. They excelled at the national

level.” Will then described how these interactions affirmed that his effort made a difference with his students. “They reinforced that by the choice of professions. By their successes and I don’t mean success necessarily at a national level.”

Randy, through service to his congregation, has made healing the dissention caused by the schism his priority. Greenleaf (2003) listed healing as one of the 10 characteristics of the servant leader. “One of the great strengths of servant-leadership is the potential for healing one’s self and others” (p. 17). Human beings suffer, according to Greenleaf, but servant leaders see their suffering as an opportunity to help make whole those to whom they come in contact.

This is where the participants in this study who received a calling to serve differ with Greenleaf. They sacrificed but never claimed to suffer – whether willingly or by force. In fact, they focus on the rewards they have received through service. The business leader and community servant (Frank) figures he likely lost significant revenue because of the time he devoted to building up his community rather than his law practice. “I got to the point where if the big picture works, I’ll be OK. I got to the point and not having to say I can’t work on this unless it gives me a legal client or sells another phone line. ...I think it (the urge to serve) has become automatic. It’s as I describe it now, and I’ve told my sons this: I’ve been so fortunate because it’s become entwined with my whole career. My whole way of living. It’s not a separate civic duty. I come to work in the morning and there’s no separate civic function. It all comes together.”

Just as he can completely rationalize the return on his investment to serve his community, Frank, the business leader and community volunteer, can’t quantify the impact he has had because he answered a call to serve. He can tell stories, including one

about the couple that moved to the community because of jobs created at a plant the participant helped attract. The story takes him back to the 1980s. “I remember seeing friends of mine losing their farms. I saw things in my law office helping them work through things, or helping the banker help them. Either way, I saw both sides of those issues. I remember thinking about those things and I think one of the most rewarding things I ever saw was a couple of young people whom I knew were decent people. Smart. Had the wherewithal to do things. Got jobs at the plant that we helped recruit here. That was very rewarding.”

“I also remember that I gave up 20 percent of my billing that year in the law office working on those community projects. I remember wrestling with that: I have kids to buy tennis shoes for. Am I really doing the right thing? ...I have felt very fortunate that what I was doing community-wise was helping my own career. I don’t know how else to put it. Every time I have given to my community, I feel it has been rewarded 10 times more.”

Another quality, according to Greenleaf (2003), is building community. “All that is needed to rebuild community as a viable life form for large numbers of people is for enough servant-leaders to show the way, not by mass movements, but by each servant-leader demonstrating his own unlimited liability for a quite specific community-related group” (p. 19).

The three participants witnessed their mentor display these characteristics, and then tried to emulate it. The participants also felt compelled to respond when this mentor called, which is a characteristic of a servant leader (Jennings and Stahl-Wert, 2003).

“Serving Leaders articulate a purpose so compelling that people are willing to run toward

it. The leaders set the pace, and this spirit gets transferred to the people they serve” (p. 90). While the three participants may not have “run” toward their mentor’s call, they felt compelled to answer his suggestion that they served their community. “I think I started putting the pieces together and identified that’s what it was,” said Frank, the business leader. “I saw that in my parents – the same level of priorities. The same level of commitment.”

The call to serve can be fulfilling. David, the retired business owner and humanitarian, has little that is tangible to show for his effort to bring the people of Haiti potable drinking water. He’s given his time, his money and his expertise. He refers to the wooden map hanging on his wall and talks about a small island where the organization has done good work. Previously the humanitarian had told a story about children with pot bellies and red hair – not because of gluttony, but because malnutrition caused by parasites in their water. “The infant mortality rate was phenomenal.” No more. “I can give you, I can show you the pictures of the little children I talked about with the pot bellies – they’re not there anymore.” He smiles and deflects any accolades that are sure to follow. “It’s not about me anyway. It’s about the Lord called me to this to begin with. I’m not sure I recognized that calling initially. In retrospect, I did.” Then, he talks numbers, in terms of wells dug and people served. “I think we’re working on 750 wells. If you figure water for 300 to 400 people per well, we’ve brought a lot of water to folks. It’s changed lives like you can’t believe.”

According to Bethel (1995), rewards for the servant leader typically are intangible. “The rewards most people want most are priceless: the pleasure of an honest compliment, the excitement of taking a risk, the feelings of self-fulfillment, self-esteem,

and true team spirit, the electrifying sense of being part of something greater than themselves” (p. 145).

The rewards for the business owner (Brenda) who accepted her father’s role in their community are turning the intangible to tangible. “There’s still work to be done. We had no child-care center. The community needed one. We had a lot of home-based, but still not enough for employees. We had a fund drive. We now have a nonprofit child care that’s owned by the community. It’s been open a couple of years. We have 80 kids. Those are the kind of things that people of this community are very giving. If you went to the stoplight and went north, we have four new ballfields. ... We have strong foundations in our community. We have a mindset a lot of times if someone passes away, they will establish a memorial in our foundation. We’re adding an addition to our hospital. (Name omitted) is a very giving community. That’s what makes it special.” So she can’t stop talking about the results? “That would be fair.” So does she believe she has made her community a better place? “The one thing we’ve found – and my dad and his generation -- they mentored the next generation and then we’re mentoring the next generation down. Part of it comes from within and you feel an obligation.”

James, the public servant and retired educator, can’t seem to stay away from city hall. He sacrificed his role as an educator because he didn’t believe he had enough time to teach and lead the community as mayor. “Life is jumbled like spaghetti. You have to follow a lot of spaghetti noodles to get to the other end.”

The call to serve must be acknowledged. Megan, the mother of five, knew as a young adult that she was destined to be a parent and serve her family. As a teenager, however, her top priority was just the opposite. “So back then, I thought there is no way

I am going to have children. I didn't even think I would get married. I had no interest in having children and didn't want to bring them into this – quote – world. Why would I want to contribute to whatever? It was just the paradigm I was in at the time.”

Then, something happened: She met her future husband. He was a Christian, who wasn't afraid to challenge his new friend. “He began challenging me in a spiritual side of life. ... So I picked up a Bible and started looking through it.”

So her spiritual calling came first. “And so then it was a total surrender of myself, saying ‘Wow, I have been selfish and not by my standards. Just not a life worthy of respect. Thus began my journey in faith.”

Her spiritual calling led to a new outlook – one with hope. “That's a Christian term that gets thrown around a lot, but I know what it means: “My life was hopeless before. Why would I want to have children if I saw life as hopeless?” No longer. A new outlook meant a different approach to raising a family: Why should she deprive herself of a family? “I feel it is the Lord's calling absolutely. One I must answer.”

Schuster (2003) lists two reasons people don't respond passionately and constantly to their calls: They don't know how to answer, even when they know their calls exist, and they focus on other aspects of their lives. “We get distracted from the deep work and play out our lives on their surface, with considerable encouragement from our culture for diversion and avoidance” (p. 15).

Once she found her Lord, the mother of five (Megan), married, and answered her calling, but wasn't distracted. Still, at times, the calling wasn't clear, especially when she longed for more children, but they didn't come. Her plans were to change the way she pursued her calling – through adoption.

Although his mentor didn't force him to respond, Frank, the business and community leader, recalled that his mentor placed the opportunity before him – in a private setting. Frank responded.

Serving isn't always easy. According to Schuster (2003), "Calls are neither constantly clear nor easy once we heed them" (p. 18). Living a called life doesn't necessarily have to be difficult, but it can be. "From joy to dread, responding to calls provides a large sweep of feelings and reactions" (p. 20). The literature explains the challenges and consequences a call can mean for the bearer's life.

Serving and sacrifice go hand-in-hand (Hunter, 2004). Service occurs when one meets the legitimate needs of others – as was the case of the former business owner and humanitarian (David) who provided potable drinking water for the people of Haiti. These were people he didn't know and knew little about until he accepted an invitation to his friend's house. "My friend quoted me two or three verses of scripture from the book of James. These verses say if you have everything you need and you see someone in need, and you say to him go get fed and God bless you, and don't do anything to bring that blessing about, what good is your faith? That was the challenge my friend handed me. Stop and think about it for a minute. That's quite a challenge." One month later – in January 1986 – "we loaded up about eight people and went to Haiti for the first time. I crawled on an airplane for the first time thinking what in the world have I done now. I had no intentions of doing anything like that. That thought had never crossed my mind. That was how many years ago? Twenty-five years ago. I have been on the board of that mission for the last 20 years. I've been involved with it continually since then. The Lord

called me. I had no intentions of doing that when I went down there. However, He had different plans.”

Service then leads to sacrifice, which occurs when one foregoes his or her ego, lust for power, pride and other self-interests for the great good. “We may have to sacrifice our need to be liked, our bad habit of avoiding conflict, our desire to have all of the answers, to look good, to always be right. When we serve others, we will have to forgive, apologize, and give others credit even when we do not feel like it” (p. 78). The sacrifices made by the participants called to service have been well-documented, but the words they use to describe their experiences indicate they believe otherwise. “I think it’s (his calling) a part of me,” said Will, the retired educator. “It’s still to help others.”

Service means extending oneself (Hunter, 2004), with the likelihood of being rejected and underappreciated, and having others take advantage of you. “Indeed, we will have to sacrifice and subordinate anything that gets in the way of doing the right thing with and for people” (p. 78).

Service and sacrifice lead to selflessness, which Hunter (2004) describes as meeting the needs of others. “The will to serve and sacrifice for others, the willingness to set aside our wants and needs to seeking the greatest good for others – this is what it means to be selfless. This is what it means to be a leader” (pp. 99-100).

Showing empathy to others is another aspect of service (Spears, 1995). “This entails learning to walk in someone else’s shoes. Being able to empathize is a sign of our maturity” (p. 152). David, the former business owner and humanitarian, couldn’t walk in the Haitians’ shoes and know what it’s like not to have potable water. But he did walk where they walk, and lived where they live. Then, he did something to better their living

conditions. “The infant mortality rate was phenomenal. Through a series of circumstances, I was able to see what this clean water did.”

Megan, the mother of five, recalls being in conflict with her call. She and her husband had had one child, but wanted more. One year passed, then another. She wasn’t getting pregnant. “At that point, a calling for motherhood began to be a painful thing for me because I wanted it so desperately, and I couldn’t have it. ... My husband and I had the desire for lots of children. There was a time when my relationship with the Lord – my prayer life – it became very, very painful. I did not have the joy in my heart that I should have. I was putting too much emphasis on fulfilling the calling of motherhood.”

The stay-at-home foster mother (Julie) felt a similar longing. Her desire to be a mother goes back to when she was growing up. She babysat and worked in the nursery at church. “They’re easy to get along with for me. We still to this day long to have our own children, but the Lord hasn’t seen fit to give us that. What he has given us is the opportunity to minister to other people’s kids.”

David, the humanitarian and former business owner, initially had difficulty accepting his calling to bring potable water to the people of Haiti – but not because he didn’t believe in the cause. His challenge came when the people he was helping seemingly took the good will for granted and wanted more. “Discouraged may not be the proper word. Aggravated might be better to the response I saw in people. Then, I began to realize that that response had nothing to do with me. I wasn’t called to even make a comment on that response so let’s ask to carry on with what I was called to do.” The humanitarian realized he couldn’t control the outcome of his efforts, but he might still be able to influence the outcome. That was good enough for him.

People with callings often attract saboteurs – those who do not believe, disagree with the calling, or are resentful (Schuster, 2003). The worst saboteur, however, is the person who is called. “Although is it handy to attribute the force of evil to others, the simple truth is that we often do battle with ourselves. We have all been guilty at times not only of squelching the life force that wants to be called in others, but even of turning our own worst inclinations against ourselves” (p. 63).

The humanitarian (David) avoided sabotaging his own calling by refusing to become discouraged by the response he received from the people he was serving. “The gist of the matter is I suppose maybe the thought (to be discouraged with his calling) crossed my mind early on. I had to make it work somehow.” Megan, the stay-at-home mother of five, also avoided sabotaging her calling by exploring alternative ways to build her family. Julie, the foster mother, also looked to alternative means for feeding her call by responding to a request to take foster children into her home.

Theme: Calls can come at unexpected times.

The educator (Nicole) attributes her calling to work with youth to interactions she had with role models throughout her life. The first interaction came during her first day of kindergarten. Another interaction came years later while attending a Future Homemakers of America state leadership conference. “I remember seeing one of the state officers who was up there on the stage in her little red jacket. I don’t remember all her words, but I remember her being such a strong, positive leader. I don’t think she used the word attitude, but today I think we choose our attitudes. That was the message I left with that day. I remember thinking I want to be like her.”

Table 8

Theme: Calls can come at unexpected times.

Calls can be identified by signs.
Calls generate possibilities.

Look for the signs. Levoy (1997) lists some of the ways – which he describes as signs – that lead to recognizing a call: an overheard conversation that seems to be directed at you, song lyrics that stick in your head, an ultimatum given by a friend or partner. “We thus need to recognize our calls in many disguises” (p. 5). Then, one must act. “Responding to a call means doing something about it” (p. 5). Nicole, the educator, didn’t start her day at kindergarten thinking she was picking a profession, but it finished that way. “I remember my first day of kindergarten, coming home and saying to my family ‘I’m going to be a kindergarten teacher.’” She also remembers the impression she had of a high school leader. “I don’t think she used the word ‘attitude,’ but today I think we choose our attitudes. That was the message I left with that day.”

Calls can be subtle and calls can be obvious (Schuster, 2003). Some last for decades, even a lifetime. Others for shorter times. “These are the less obvious calls that engage our minds and hearts, do not win us trophies, and yet make all the difference to society and to ourselves when we make the decision to do something worthwhile” (p. 27).

For the educator (Julie), the signs were a conversation with a kindergarten teacher and the inspirational words from a teenage FBLA leader who was wearing a red jacket. For the retired educator and public servant (James) the sign was the feeling of peace he

felt in a military chapel after saying a prayer in which he asked for guidance and peace. For the pastor (Matthew), a sign was his involvement in Bible class for people with developmental challenges while in college. “That was one ministry of the church that had an impact on me.”

Be open to possibilities. The former business owner and humanitarian (David) didn’t know what to expect when a friend invited him to his house to meet the man who would later serve as his mentor. Instead of declining the offer, he went – and the experience changed his life.

Schuster (2003) describes going from current reality and moving toward another realm as working the veil. In his book, he writes about Arnold, a new cafeteria employee. This man changed the eating experience for employees in this office building and challenged his co-workers to do the same. “Who knows where Arnold is now, off to bigger and better things, I hope. But wherever he is, he is most likely working the veil for new possibilities” (p. 136).

The environmentalist (Gary) finished graduate school carrying with him a degree and a vague feeling about what might happen next in his life. “At that time, I probably started to think more about life in terms of destiny. A journey. A quest. I can recall times when whether that came through a popular culture or something else was going on, other people were doing things I thought were neat that were kind of cast in a save-the-world kind of thing. They were doing something that I could do too.” Then, what he describes as “whether you call it a calling or destiny – it was a logical progression of what I thought I could accomplish.” He learned about work being done in the Chicago area to restore prairieland. “Why couldn’t we do that here? I think immediately this

could be what the vehicle we could drive to accomplish some of our goals – to be employed and do what we want to do. ...That calling was an evangelistic period in my upbringing. I chose to think I could change things. I could add. I call it evangelism in that field. That was where I was in my head.”

Megan, the stay-at-home mother of five, recalled the time in her life when she and her husband wanted more children – but she was having difficulty getting pregnant. Their experience with their first child filled them with a desire to have more, she explained. She found herself questioning her calling and questioning her Lord (her first calling). The couple realized they could fulfill their desire for more children by adopting. The stay-at-home mother of five described her mindset and the opportunity she discovered. “We had our first daughter, and then, honestly, when she was four months old, we wanted more. We were ready. And no children were coming. I wasn’t getting pregnant. A year passed. And another year passed. ...At that point a calling for motherhood began to be a painful thing for me because I wanted it so desperately. ...So at that time, I realized, after several months of depression, I realized what I was going through. This is terrible. I have told the Lord I will not be happy. I will not have joy unless you give me kids.” Then she realized she had options and could still fulfill her calling to be a mother. “I finally realized I was being stupid and selfish. How dare I not be thankful for – and this was no one telling me this – why not be thankful for the one daughter I was given? Maybe I am not supposed to give birth to the rest of this large family. Duh. There are a lot of children out there who need homes. ...I wasn’t even thinking adoption – that was this tremendous weight lifted off of me.”

“It mended my relationship with the Lord – and then He said to me: ‘Ha, ha, ha. Here’s twins.’”

Theme: Answering a call can be rewarding – but those rewards aren’t always obvious.

Participants sometimes talked about the burdens their calls meant they must carry, including demands on their time. But mostly, they talked about the rewards they brought. “We both knew even before we said ‘I do,’ we wanted to have a big family. I want to look down the table and see these precious children and know this is what we started. And have a bunch of grandchildren and fill our house with love and joy,” explained the stay-at-home mother of five (Megan). The stay-at-home foster mother (Julie) said: “Once again, it goes back to longing for children. Obviously, we can’t have our own. Obviously, this is a great way to reach a number of kids, and in this particular instance, six. Next time it may be one.” So this woman spends her days caring for children from another family.

Levoy (1997) states that following one’s calling can sometimes help heal the past. Returning to the past, according to Levoy, allows the recipients to remember themselves and to pull themselves together into a more solid shape and form. “Sometimes we’re called to move backward so that we can move forward with a greater sense of ourselves, and with great confidence” (p. 185). The stay-at-home mother (Megan) refused to abandon her calling during a time when it appeared as if it had abandoned her – and now she has five children.

Table 9

Theme: Answering a call can be rewarding – but those rewards aren’t always obvious.

Calls bring all types of rewards.
The rewards aren’t always immediate.

Calls bring all types of rewards. Participants overwhelmingly stated that they weren’t looking for external rewards for answering their calls. Frank, the business man and community leader, reported that knowing his community was a better place for its residents was reward enough for him. The educator (Nicole) reported the pleasure she feels when she hears what her students are doing. The educator’s rewards don’t end with satisfaction of knowing she has impacted her students’ lives. Her calling has brought joy and happiness into her life. “I use those words with kids all the time. I think it is so important to find joy and bring joy. So I ask myself that all the time. That’s one of those easy things to check with yourself on a daily basis.”

For Gary, the environmentalist, answering his call to form a nonprofit organization that includes an educational component meant facing the stress of worrying about meeting budget and paying bills. “But when I have the satisfaction of programming, like the kids’ program is 20 years old, is priceless. The satisfaction and opportunity. That’s the payoff that happened from the beginning because I felt it was a calling. It didn’t take much to excite you. Every time it happens, it reinforces the decisions and the calling. If that were to fail, it would all be worth it – even on a selfish level.”

Two of the rewards that calls bring are relief and joy (Schuster, 2003). “Living a called life is not all mystery and drudgery by any means. Responding to a call can be a relief after a long search and considerable confusion. It can often feel joyous” (p. 18). Said Megan, the stay-at-home mother of five: “My life was hopeless before. Why would I want to have children if I saw life as hopeless. I didn’t want to do that. Now, this renewed vision of life and a new vision of eternity – yes children are a joy.”

The rewards aren’t always immediate. James, the retired educator and public servant, recalled being oblivious to his call to lead – which he attributes to efforts by his mentor who placed him in situations in which he could take on responsibility and, ultimately, lead. He didn’t realize the benefits of these experiences until much later when he was placed in leadership roles with his military unit and within his community. Now, he attributes his success as a public servant to those experiences in high school.

For Megan, the mother of five, the unwanted rewards tied to her calling also come with a price. Her challenge is facing pressure to meet other’s standards that she is the ideal mother because she sacrificed to raise her children. “I don’t want to feel that pressure: ‘Great, now we have to be perfect. We’re not perfect. In fact, I almost rejoice in the times when my kids act out or when I ... I try to show myself as real. I do get angry with my children. I do lose my temper and I do mess up. Almost to drop those other people’s view of me.” The mother of five has figured out how to turn the negative into a positive. First, she views the scrutiny – especially when she hears other adults complaining about the difficulties of parenting – as a challenge to set higher standards for how she raises her children. “That sounds like I am complaining when people compliment me, but those I feel like I am undeserving of their compliments.”

Theme: Secular callings can come from a religious calling

While discussing the spiritual aspects of leadership (Spears and Lawrence, 2004), healing and caring are part of the conversation. Being seen as a caring leader is not a sign weakness, according to the authors. Spears and Lawrence (2004) suggested that leaders who ensure that change is handled sensitively and who genuinely care about the people in their organizations are astute.

The stay-at-home foster mother (Julie) has experienced rewards from her calling on two different fronts. The more obvious: “Just seeing the changes in what these kids have made. It is night and day compared to what they were when they came to us.” The less obvious: A stronger relationship with her God. “If I was just living my life to please myself, I would not be doing this. I gave my life to the Lord when I was 9 and I’ve strived to live it for Him, whether it’s going to college, whether it’s riding a horse, whether it’s being with people in a work setting or having foster kids or being married – I’ve tried to live a life pleasing to Him and worthy of what he’s called me to do.”

Table 10

Theme: Secular callings can come from a religious calling – “The call to spiritual living is the calling I have to live out as a Christian. Every day it becomes a guiding principal whether I fail as a Christian or succeed. That’s the foundation.”

Religious and secular callings can co-exist.
 Religious and secular callings can, at times, be in conflict.
 A religious calling can spawn secular callings.

Their testimony is quite clear as to where their callings originate. Said David, the former business owner and humanitarian: “As I look back – and the Lord knows all this

stuff – He still loved me. In spite of that, He stuck by me.” Said Jenny, the business owner: “I would rather call it a ‘faith’ calling. If you look at it, in the definition, it means to honor the Supreme Being.” Said Megan, the stay-at-home mother of five: “They (her callings) are so side-by-side in my mind. They are separate. Well, if it meant having to choose, I would choose following the Lord. But that doesn’t diminish my love for being a mother. ...I feel it is the Lord’s calling absolutely.” Finally, the retired farmer and business man (Randy) said: “I think that for some reason, OK God, you must want me here for some reason, so let’s keep plodding along. ...I guess my religious experience – if you want to call it that – it’s always personal. It’s like I feel God has me here for the purpose of helping people.”

Schuster (2003) places the call to spiritual service in the “external heart” portion of his two-axis grid. Those in this category run the gambit – from local pastors, who makes this call the cornerstone of their lives, to “anyone whose devotion to God or a higher source is strong in their lives” (p. 32). Society is full of examples of people living this type of calling (Schuster, 2003). “...from all the saints and Mother Teresa to Aunt Millie, who never missed her daily prayers and never had anything but a kind word for everyone” (p. 32). Mother Teresa’s call to serve may be more apparent, but the strength of “Aunt Millie’s” calling is no less obvious. It’s just a matter of perception.

Matthew, the pastor, and Randy, the retired farmer and business man, serve as examples of Schuster’s premise. Matthew, as a member of the clergy, would be more apparent for his religious calling, although he explained that service plays a large part of his calling. Randy’s calling to his congregation might go unnoticed except for the behind-the-scenes unifying role he is playing. “When people leave with their pride, they

can't come back. For the last three years, that's been one of my focuses. We don't beg anybody, but we welcome them. We try to resolve any issues – I've been a part of that.”

All calls aren't created equally (Schuster 2003). While the super-talented and the saints may experience “mega-calls” (i.e. Mother Teresa), other calls are more routine. “One or two calls may take up most of our time – such as being a good parent and adding as much value as possible through our daily work – but other smaller calls – like staying true to a friend facing cancer and needing support – may also work their way into our lives” (p. 27). Schuster (2003) recommends paying special attention to all one's calls – as they evolve and regress – throughout a lifetime. James, the retired educator and public servant, has cataloged his three calls. “Yes I have calling. When I describe my calling, I actually have had three callings in my life. ...The call to spiritual living is the calling I have to live as a Christian. Every day it becomes a guiding principal, whether I fail as a Christian or succeed. That's the foundation. The educational part, I learned a lot of things that taught me how to interact with a very diverse community. ...the Christian faith is permanent. The mayor thing is temporary. I recognize that. Am I prepared for it to end now? No. Will I be prepared for when it ends? No, but I will be. I'll be able to go in there and create the next world because I've never not done that. I'm confident I will do that when the time comes.”

Religious and secular callings can co-exist. James, the retired educator and public servant, lists his spiritual calling as his first – and most important – of three callings. His calling came while he was serving in Vietnam, specifically while he was praying in a chapel. “I left with the full knowledge I was saved by God, that if I lived or if I died, I was OK. ...When I knelt at that little chapel – and I don't remember what I

said ... but to me it changed my life, absolutely changed from being extremely anxious and scared to one of confidence of contentment of peace, knowing that if I died, I was going to heaven as I believed. It was a very profound freeing of my spirit.”

Three weeks later, he was struck in the face with a bullet from the enemy. “But at that moment, literally at the seconds of the impact of the bullet in my face, I made a choice to become a civilian and live. ...I believe I was called back to life.” Two other calls followed – one to follow his mentor into education and one to serve his community. The conflict came when his call to be an educator and his call as a public servant left too little time to fulfill either. He felt he wasn’t doing either justice. One had to give because he realized that the two callings – both of which he embraced – were in conflict. That’s when, he said, he decided to retire as an educator and put all his effort into being mayor. He knows his time as an elected public servant won’t last forever. At some point, he will step away and his plan is to do so when he is still appreciated by the people he has been called to serve. Don’t be mistaken, the retired educator and public servant said, he loves his job and he loves serving his community. “But being mayor isn’t all who I am. There will be a day when I will walk away. ...But there will always be something else that I can do. I am certain of it.”

The local business and community leader (Frank) tries to keep his three callings – God, family, community – in balance. “There’s been a couple of times when I’m out raising money for some community project and I think, ‘Should I be raising money for my church?’” His solution is to keep track of his time to the point of charting it – and then looking for opportunities to balance. “If you think you’re out of balance, there is always an opportunity to right the balance.”

Participants explained that their varied callings originated from their belief in God. “It’s church, family, community – in that order,” added Frank, the business leader and community servant. Julie, the stay-at-home foster mother, said: “The Lord certainly laid it on our hearts. We had lots of people praying for us. Our parents. Our grandparents. Friends. Praying for direction for us. We’re going to look into foster care. Pray for us.”

The stay-at-home mother of five (Megan) found her calls could co-exist – even if they were in conflict for a time when she wanted more children and was not getting pregnant. Even her physician was skeptical – but was eventually proven wrong. “All were miracles – flukes the doctors told me. They don’t understand how my body works. So now I have these five kids.”

Religious and secular callings can, at times, be in conflict. Schuster (2003) contends that one can experience multiple callings simultaneously, and “you need to balance and combine them” (p. 5).

The stay-at-home mother of five (Megan) explained how her callings temporarily were in conflict when she wanted more children, but was not getting pregnant. The conflict left her feeling out of balance with her Lord – the source of her first calling. In time, she realized she didn’t have to be their birth mother, in order to have more children. She could adopt. That revelation put her callings back in balance, which were further aligned when she became pregnant – several times.

The foster mother (Julie) initially also felt conflict in her life. “Six years ago, we thought we don’t have kids of our own yet. ...This house (their current residence) became available to use and we have lots of room. We said we should check what the

need is here in Nebraska with foster kids. We love kids. We have tons of nieces and nephews. He comes from a family of six. I only have a brother, but I always babysat. The Lord provided us with this house and we wondered if this maybe was something we're supposed to use it for to reach out and help people, preferably kids, give them a place to live and play."

Frank, the business man and community leader, explained that his calling to serve his Lord, his calling to serve his community and his calling to serve his family have, at times, caused him consternation when he thought he was feeding one calling at the expense of the others. His solution: Feed the callings he viewed as being slighted until they have returned to balance.

A religious calling can spawn secular callings. The two stay-at-home mothers (Megan and Julie) acknowledge that their calling to serve their Lord led to their desire to have children. Had the Lord seen fit not to help them fulfill their desire to be parents, they said, they would have ultimately accepted it as God's wish for their lives. Yet, caring for children has brought fulfillment into their lives, and strengthened their religious calling, they said. Their prayers have been answered, they explained. Their two callings – to serve their Lord and to fulfill their desire to be mothers – are intertwined, they said, although their first calling will always be their most dominant one.

The retired farmer and business man (Randy) first gave his life to his Lord. Then, he realized he was meant to serve his church and its flock. Then, this flock came to extend beyond his church community. "I have a commitment to God before any church, and this seems to be the place where I am supposed to be." That sense of purpose extends to his professional life. "It's like I feel God has me here for the purpose of

helping people. It's interesting that when I first came to work at this bank, the first three years, I spent more time counseling people across this desk than selling insurance. The two work together in many ways. Insurance is solving people's problems. ...People know me well enough in the community, and they can talk to me about things. I pray with them."

Other participants tied their secular callings – mostly those to serve – to their religious callings. For the retired educator and public servant (James), his religious calling came first, followed by his secular calling, as was the case for the former business owner and humanitarian (David). His belief in God compelled him to look beyond himself to others. "I'm not going to stand here and tell you that I do everything just right," the humanitarian explained. "There are days when I have to get down on my knees and ask God to please forgive me."

Summary of Findings

The purpose of this study was to answer the central question: What are the experiences that lead to a calling in a person's life? Using the central question as a starting point, the purpose of this study also was to answer the sub-questions: (a) Describe the experiences in your life that led you to feel commitment toward your profession, your community, your family, and your faith, and your community; (b) Describe how you responded to these feelings of commitment in your life and whether you embraced these feelings; (c) Describe the times (or experiences) when you felt any of these commitments went hand in hand with other commitments, and how you responded; and (d) Do you view your callings as more of a blessing or a hindrance? According to

Moustakas (1994), the textural description of themes that emerge from the findings describes the “what” participants experienced, while the structural description describes the context of these experiences. The essence is created by integrating the textural and structural descriptions, which answers the central question.

Textural description. According to Creswell (1998), the textural description focuses on what was experienced by participants. Study participants often found it difficult to describe what led to their feelings of strong commitment, or calling, to a part of their lives. Until being asked to participate in this study, a majority of the participants explained that they had not asked themselves whether they possessed a calling. As they further discussed the sense of commitment they felt in their lives, participants were able to describe the life experiences that led them to realize they possessed a calling. In some cases, these experiences involved relationships with mentors or brief encounters with the people who influenced their lives.

In the case of the educator (Nicole), she described several moments in time that influenced her life to work with young people. Other participants, especially the stay-at-home mother of five (Megan), the retired farmer and business man (Randy), the business owner (Jenny), the retired educator and public servant (James) and the former business owner and humanitarian (David) linked their callings to the point in their lives when they accepted Jesus Christ as their savior. From that point, their perceived purpose for their lives evolved from their religious grounding.

Structural description. According to Creswell (1998), the structural description focuses on how this was experienced by participants. The participants experienced their callings in various ways: through the influence and inspiration of

mentors, through their acceptance of Jesus Christ as their savior, through experiencing a strong sense to serve others, and through chance encounters with others who were either influential or served as sources of inspiration or motivation.

Participants acknowledged that they weren't initially aware that they were being called at these moments. In retrospect, they understand the impact those moments had on their lives – but only after these moments had passed. Because the moment of their callings had passed, participants could only describe the experience in past tense. None described how they realized and recognized their callings in negative terms – although some, including Megan, the stay-at-home mother of five, professed that their callings had, at times, caused angst in their lives. Yet, the participants explained that their lives were full because of their callings and they had, at times, been rewarded for answering their callings – although this was not a point of motivation for answering them. They indicated that they did not seek or expect any betterment because they answer their callings.

The essence. A phenomenological study typically ends with the reader better understanding the essential, invariant structure, or essence, of the participants' experience with the phenomenon under study (Creswell, 1998). This process allows readers to recognize that a single unifying meaning of the experience exists. "For example, this means that all experiences have an underlying 'structure'" (p. 55). The participants – all identified by leaders in their community as potentially possessing a calling – described the connections they felt – in many cases through relationships with others – as the impetus for their callings, which they described as life-changing

experiences. In some cases, these connections led participants to lead lives of service to their communities and to others.

For the participants in this study, their callings came unsolicited. The participants neither went looking for them, nor did they try to create them, although Megan, the mother of five, attempted to fulfill hers by taking an alternative means (adoption). Finally, none of the participants volunteered to discuss their callings, although they were willing when approached. They did discover that their callings caused them to reconstruct their lives – a change they ultimately welcomed and embraced.

The participants shared their experiences about what led them to feel deep commitments in their lives. These experiences occurred at various stages in their lives. Participants expressed a willingness to allow these experiences to alter their lives and displayed flexibility in responding to the direction these experiences took them.

Although their life situations differed widely, the participants acknowledged that their lives might not be as fulfilling had these experiences, ultimately callings, not occurred. These experiences – callings – led to their reports of greater enrichment in their lives.

In all situations, participants' callings led to great awareness of service to others. For several participants, this service was grounded in their acceptance of Jesus Christ as their lord and savior. These religious callings opened the door for additional callings in their lives. In other situations, the service came through interaction with and direction from a person who ultimately served as a role model and mentor. The relationship wasn't sought by participants, nor was it rebuked. As one participant described his calling "It just happened."

By describing their life experiences, participants revealed a greater awareness of what was important in their lives – and, in nearly unanimous agreement – said their callings meant additional opportunities in their lives, not added burdens.

For the 12 residents of a Midwestern community, callings – although at times cumbersome and confusing at other times – brought enrichment in their lives. James, the retired educator and public servant, relishes his role as a community leader. Frank, the business and community leader, doesn't lament business lost while he focused on improving his community. Megan, the stay-at-home mother, cherishes her time at home with her children and doesn't dwell on what career path she might have chosen had she not followed her calling to be a parent.

Chapter 5

Discussion

Prior research has recognized that callings can come in many forms and at all times in a person's life. Prior research, however, is limited relating to how those calls are recognized, which is the focus of this study. This study presented the question of what experiences lead to callings. Several participants credited their mentors for their callings to serve.

The participants found that this calling to serve was powerful and wasn't easily pushed aside. Although sometimes in conflict, the participants reported that their callings could co-exist and feed off of one other. They also found one calling strengthened another. Finally, although at times their conflicts caused tension in their lives, participants unanimously viewed their callings as a positive addition to their lives. Often, callings are tied to one's profession or one's religious beliefs (Steger, Pickering, Shin, & Dik, 2010). More recent research inquiry has focused on strong commitments found in workplace (i.e., Duffy, Dik, & Steger, 2011; Elangovan, Pinder, & McLean, 2010;).

Just as the concept of calling can be traced to biblical times (Moses and his calling by God to lead the Israelites from Egypt), so does the concept of mentoring in the Old Testament book of Proverbs (Stone, 2004).

The theory of servant leadership is a more recent phenomenon. Greenleaf (1998) popularized the notion that one must serve before one can lead. Wheeler and Barbuto (2006) tied servant leadership and calling in their integrated construct of servant leadership, which includes – as one of five constructs – altruistic calling.

Foundations of the Study

This query that explored how to recognize one's calling found evidence of a connection to religious beliefs, a connection to the positive influence of a mentor and a connection between calling and servant leadership. Most prevalent among participants was the business and community leader (Frank) who, because of his interaction with a longtime business man, recognized his calling to serve his community by making it a better place for its residents. The participant didn't seek out this path for his life, but acknowledged that he was open to his calling when it came. The participant's mentor chose him to assume his role in his community. Entwined in his calling was his connection with Jesus Christ, which he viewed as the more important of his callings. Serving his callings, the participant explained, may have created inner conflict as he tried to balance the demands on his time, but was never a burden he would rather not carry.

This study sought to describe how strong commitments in one's life translate into callings. Those commitments came in the form of a strong desire to serve – as a parent, to be a community leader, as an educator, and/or as a Christian. In some situations, the formation of these commitments can be traced to the influence of another – a mentor.

Linking calling and community service. The linkage between calling (religious and secular), servant leadership and mentoring has ramifications for leadership studies. At the community level, the combination could have a powerful effect. (Chaskin, et al, 2001) stated that developing new leaders adds vigor to a community. The solution may be to allow leaders to emerge and develop rather than to select them. Rather than returning to what Morse (2004) terms the traditional leaders – key business people, well-known members of the clergy, and representatives from civic organizations, local

hospitals, schools and charities – communities could, instead, tap into the less-obvious candidates – those who haven't been put in the situation where they could lead. The retired educator and public servant (James) recounted how, first, his vocational education teacher placed him in progressively more challenging situations where he could develop his leadership skills. Later, two established community residents filled this role and replicated leadership qualities for him to follow and establish. He considered the vocational education teacher to be a mentor – whose guidance helped established his calling to lead.

The role of mentors. With this connection to calling and, ultimately, to servant leadership, the role of the mentor has added importance – especially during the selection process. Just as it is crucial to screen, orient, and evaluate mentors (Murray, 2001) – “those who accept the mentor role must know that the primary reason for the relationship is to develop skills and experience in the protégé systematically” (p.56) – mentors must choose wisely. Facilitated mentoring is a way for a mentor – in this case a community leader – to leave his or her legacy. “Most of us want a bit more than our fifteen minutes of fame, and passing on our ideas can promote a lasting legacy” (p. 62).

Mentee selection, according to Murray (2001), includes self-nomination, nomination by a superior, and sponsor nomination. The primary criterion for protégé selection is the protégé's motivation to learn new skills or improve existing ones. “No matter how formally or informally the relationship is structured, if the protégé is not motivated, nothing is gained” (p. 135).

Although geared toward a work environment, Murray's other criteria could be incorporated in the selection and maturation of community leaders: the ability to perform

in more than one functional area and the assessed ability to perform at least two levels above the current level of performance. The longtime community leader must have recognized the ability in the business leader and community leader (Frank) when he selected him to get more involved in their community. Similarly, the vocational education teacher must have recognized something in the retired educator and public servant (James) that enticed him to single out this student and challenge him to extend himself. “Motivated individuals are also likely to take personal responsibility for their own growth and development. Mentoring removes the responsibility for skill development from the organization (in this case, the community) and puts it squarely on the shoulders of the individual, where it belongs” (p. 136).

Johnson and Ridley (2004) also suggested that mentors be selective in choosing their protégés. Establishing a mentoring relationship is similar to making an investment. Discernment and vigilance should be part of the selection process. “You cannot mentor everyone. No matter how energized, idealistic, and gifted you are, taking on too many protégés is a sure way to compromise your own health and the quality of your mentoring. Excellent mentors appreciate the costs of mentoring” (p. 3).

In recognizing his calling while in the early stages of establishing his relationship with his mentor, the former business owner and humanitarian (David) saw something special in the man: “I saw a man who wasn’t going to give up trying.” This participant identified perseverance as a desirable trait in the person who would serve as his mentor for decades to come. He also identified his mentor’s compassion and dedication as positive and desirable traits – and as additional reasons for his commitment to the nonprofit organization and a life of service. Frank, the business leader and community

leader, recognized his mentor's commitment to his community and his selflessness as positive traits that served as motivation for him to adopt a similar approach in serving his community.

The power of a calling. Whether subtle or obvious, participants generally agreed that their callings were too powerful to ignore. While these callings came in different forms and at different times in their lives, participants also generally agreed that they were difficult to ignore. "A call is the impulse to move ahead in a meaningful way. It is a mind-body push into the future" (Schuster, 2003, p. 14). The participants came to understand the power of their callings. So can they be ignored? The participants would answer in the negative. But they may be misunderstood. "For all the importance of calls, it is not often easy to figure out how to live in accordance with them. The process can be a strenuous, even exhausting, struggle" (p. 15). Struggle brings dissonance and feelings of being out of sync.

In alignment. Responding to a calling, the outcome of recognizing one's calling, requires alignment between what one is doing and what one is called to do. This alignment is more of an internal process than an external one – once the call is received (Schuster, 2003).

Several participants recalled their lives being out of alignment – even while they were following their calls. Megan, the stay-at-home mother of five, struggled with her call to be a mother and the call to serve her Lord when she wanted more children, but couldn't get pregnant. She questioned why her Lord would give her this calling (to be a parent) but would withhold from her the means of serving her calling. A schism in his congregation caused angst for Randy, the retired farmer and business man. Both worked

through the challenging times – the stay-at-home mother of five sought out other ways to bring children into her life, while the retired farmer and businessman remained focused on serving others and showing acceptance while his congregation worked through its challenges. Julie, the foster mother, reported a similar state of being out of alignment while she and her husband figured out how they could bring children into their lives by becoming foster parents. Then, they waited until children were placed in their homes.

Early origins. Callings sometimes focus on people who have had a clear sense of theirs since their childhood days. “Their focused response is to pursue a dream, and rising above or with circumstances, they achieve notable success by making the dream happen” (Schuster, p. 18).

Most people, however, don’t have such concrete callings that become obvious earlier in their lives. They don’t have extraordinary minds or talents that point in the direction of a calling. Their accomplishments don’t make headlines. These people are more apt to be found in the shadows waiting for their moment. Schuster (2003) notes that callings for these people are less obvious. But they are no less important. Callings for those in the latter group – because the callings are not as obvious – are more apt to cause anxiety in their lives. “Calls take you beyond the confines of what you thought you knew to regions of high risk and the unknown (p. 19).

Several participants – including the educator (Nicole) and the foster mother (Julie) – said they recognized their callings early in their lives, and their callings have remained consistent. Other participants – especially the retired business owner and humanitarian (David) and the business leader and community leader (Frank) – explained that their callings came at unexpected times and from unexpected sources.

Whether their calls were present throughout their lives – but went unrecognized until authenticated – is worth discussion. “Few people actually receive big calls, in visions of flaming chariots and burning bushes” (Levoy, p. 5). Most calls don’t have such an obvious calling card. “Most of the calls we receive and ignore are the proverbial still, small voices that the biblical prophets heard, the daily calls to pay attention to our intuitions, to be authentic, to live by our own codes of honor” (p. 5). Few people, with the exception of Sinclair Lewis’ fictional Elmer Gantry, go searching for their calling for less-than-honorable reasons. The participants who were caught unaware when their callings came were leading productive, happy lives. Their lives were full. Their callings enriched their lives – but also made them a little more complicated.

Levoy (1997) broaches the subject of discernment and callings. Knowing whether a call is true or false, knowing when and how to respond, and knowing whether a call is directed toward you begs asking two questions: “‘What is right for me?’ and ‘Where am I willing to be led?’” (p. 7). The former business owner and humanitarian (David) decided where he was willing to be led after attending the meeting at his friend’s home. Throughout his orientation with the organization, he experienced doubt. He questioned whether his efforts were making a difference in the land and country to which he had devoted his time and money. He questioned his calling, but he did not abandon it. He pursued it, and he eventually embraced it and let it direct his life (along with his faith in his God).

Stifling a calling. Levoy (1997), in his book that connects callings and leading an authentic life, states that a noncompliant response to a calling, whether conscious or unconscious, can mean the destruction of a purposeful calling. He lists ten strategies for

noncompliance and – ultimately – avoiding a calling. Mentors would be advised to be aware of these noncompliance tactics when developing relationships with their mentees.

The ten strategies for avoiding a calling are:

--Hiding behind the tasks of discernment. Analyze a call and pick it apart. Pore over all the details. "...we lose all the heat from the heart through the head, as if we had been in the bitter cold without a hat" (p. 198). None of the participants indicated going through a phase of discernment of any length.

--Waiting for the perfect moment. Looking for that exact moment in time when the conditions regarding time, money, energy, freedom and more come into perfect alignment may take a lifetime. Get ready, get set, but never go. Instead of holding on to the possibility of having their own children, the foster mother (Julie) and her husband took an alternative approach and welcome foster children into their home.

--Telling yourself lies. Excuses often contain the phrase "I can't." In actuality, the excuse is "I won't," which is an abdication of desires and wishes, and self-imposed limitations. Unknowingly and temporarily, the stay-at-home mother of five (Megan) placed limitations on herself as her focus remained with restricting her parenting to biological children and not seeking alternatives.

--Choosing a parallel path. This involves choosing a path similar to one's calling, but not the actual one. An example would be the person who teaches art classes, but never makes the commitment to follow a calling to be a full-time artist. This approach could lead the called to feel unfulfilled. The foster mother (Julie) contemplated other things she could be doing, but resisted the urge to abandon her calling to be a mother.

--Dismissing a less-appealing call for a more attractive one. Money, prestige, and perception all may come into play in this situation. During the challenging times raising foster children, Julie said, she has realized that her life would be easier without her calling. Those times quickly pass, she said.

--Turning a calling into a major undertaking, which places the person called in a state of paralysis. The call seems to be too large of a task to undertake and is eventually abandoned or revised. The former business owner and humanitarian (David) felt, for a time, that his calling wasn't serving a purpose, and questioned it. In time, he realized that he needed to focus on the impact his work was having to improve others' lives, instead of concentrating on the negative responses he received from some of the people he was attempting to serve. Once he accepted this, his calling became manageable.

--Self-sabotage. Failing to act – and using this course of action – as the reason a call is abandoned. The retired educator and public servant (James) admitted that he initially lacked confidence in his abilities, but, ultimately, never allowed himself to stray too far from the path his mentor, the vocational education teacher, envisioned for him.

--Creating distractions to divert attention away from the calling. Suddenly previous callings surface and take precedence. These projects may have been shelved for years without consideration. The business owner and community leader (Brenda), when she was younger, temporarily moved away from her community because she wanted to be away from the life she led with her parents – one of community service. However, she later returned and embraced the life she was called to lead.

--Playing sour grapes. Making yourself believe that you are destined to fail at this calling, and convincing yourself that you didn't want it to begin with. The former

business owner and humanitarian (David) may not have tried to convince himself that providing potable water for the people of Haiti would fail, but he did question whether his calling was having the intended effect.

--Trying to make yourself unworthy of a calling in the spiritual sense, and “hoping that God will decide you’re not the person for the job and take it back” (p. 199).

Significance of Findings

The findings in this study are significant because they provide insight about recognizing one’s calling, which was the focus of this effort. Scant research has been conducted that serves as a guide for recognizing one’s calling. The converse is that callings – if not recognized and then understood – could go unanswered and thus unfulfilled.

One just has to review a list of great figures throughout history – Mother Teresa and Martin Luther King Jr – and wonder how society would have differed had they not first recognized their callings, then answered them. The stereotype of callings is that they come in big and glorious ways – the voice from heaven, the burning bush, the vision in the dream.

Calling cards. Callings, as described by the participants in this study, don’t come with a neon calling card. They don’t always come with the big sign. They come in subtle ways – through interactions with people, through a suggestion to serve others, through an invitation to join an organization that is working to better people’s lives, and through a commitment to follow one’s God.

The significance of the findings of this study also reinforce the concept created by Dik and Duffy (2009) of three overlapping dimensions that connect callings. While the first dimension relates to the source's recognition of the connection between calling to an external source, the second dimension involves having a sense of awareness of one's purpose and meaning in life. The third dimension relates to contributing to the well-being of society.

In the second dimension, one's effort must be placed in the larger context of purpose. David, the former business owner and humanitarian, after temporarily questioning his calling, realized that his effort to bring potable water to the people of Haiti should be his sole purpose. He found himself disillusioned because of the sense of entitlement he was seeing in the people he was trying to help. David realized that his effort was what he controlled and that he must continue to fulfill his calling despite the negative response he was receiving from the people of Haiti. This participant could be considered as initially having challenges putting his calling in context from the perspective of the second dimension. He questioned his purpose and role when the recipients of his efforts displayed responses of self-entitlement, rather than a response of gratitude for what they received. "Aggravated might be the better word to the response I saw in people," he recalled. He ultimately realized that his sense of aggravation was misguided. "I began to realize that that response (of ingratitude) had nothing to do with me. I wasn't called on to even make a comment on that response, so let's ask to carry on with what I was called to do." That realization projected him into the third dimension, where the focus is improving society as a whole. David realized that the ingratitude did not diminish the

purpose of his efforts and that he focus should remain on the great good he and his organization were doing.

Searching for a call. Elangovan, Pinder, and McLean (2010) listed the four antecedents necessary for initiating the search for one's calling and then discovering it: An urge to find meaning in one's life, attentiveness, a willingness to experiment with new paths, and a growing understanding of one's self.

The description given by the participants in this phenomenological study and the stories they told about how they recognized they were called indicates the presence of at least two of the antecedents listed by Elangovan, Pinder, and McLean (2010).

The authors listed attentiveness – the state of being vigilant or to discover one's calling – as necessary to discovering one's calling. None of the 12 participants acknowledged that he or she went looking for a calling similar to the fictional evangelist in Sinclair Lewis' novel. In most cases, the calling came to each through an encounter with another person or a life-changing experience, including a conversation with a community leader while traveling on an interstate highway and the leadership opportunities given a high school student by his vocational education instructor. In addition, none of the participants described, as part of their life's journey, an attempt to deliberately find meaning in their lives. In most cases, the participants of this study reported receiving their callings through external sources, including mentors and life experiences.

Several participants, in their description of their callings and the circumstances that led to their reception, expressed a desire to experiment with new paths for their lives and a desire for a better understanding of themselves. The public servant and retired

educator (James) described how his calling to lead led to his being open to new opportunities – to teach and to serve his community as mayor. He explained that he was open to possibilities and to opportunities – within the framework of leading. The business leader and community leader (Frank) explained that he was open to playing a stronger role in his community – at his mentor’s urging. The life story shared by Megan, the stay-at-home mother of five, included references throughout to understanding her purpose – as a Christian, as a wife, and as a mother.

The four antecedents provided by Elangovan, Pinder, and McLean (2010) as necessary for initiating the search for a calling appear to be consistent with the 10 avoidance tactics listed by Leroy (1997). The person who seeks a new path and is attentive to possibilities would likely not pass up opportunities, take a negative approach or procrastinate while waiting for a better moment – all tactics given by Leroy.

Recommendations

Callings can be viewed as a highly personal, often mysterious component of one’s life. “No one knows for sure what calls are. That is the best part about them. Calls remain in the realm of the mysterious” (Schuster, 2003, p. 14).

As a person who believes he has not yet received his life’s calling, I was motivated to conduct this study, partially for selfish reasons. What if I failed to recognize my calling when it presented itself to me? Would that mean my life would be viewed as unfulfilled because I did not realize the direction it was supposed to follow? Trying to reconcile the answers to those questions served as the intrinsic motivation for this study.

The extrinsic motivation centered on the relatively scant research that has been conducted on call recognition.

The connection of callings to leadership theory has been established previously in this paper, most notably in the work conducted by Barbuto and Wheeler (2006), who included altruistic calling in their construct of servant leadership. However, recognition of callings' viability in the literature would be considered limited at best. This study was conducted to draw further attention to the importance of recognizing one's calling, and the positive effect it can have on one's personal and professional development. The first recommendation is to gain familiarity with callings, which will lead to acceptance their importance. Greater familiarity with callings also will open doors to new avenues of research that further strengthen the connection with leadership studies.

The second recommendation from this study is for mentors, advisors and teachers to be aware of the potential profound impact they have on the lives of the people they counsel. The retired educator and public servant (James) realized that his vocational education teacher had a plan for him. He said this mentor's influence is still being felt today.

A final recommendation is for those who seek direction in their lives. Be patient. Don't force it. The inclination to force a calling may be difficult to suppress. The fictional Elmer Gantry forced his calling out of a need to continue his charade that he was meant to be a minister. Without his call, Gantry was without a means to earn a living. He needed his call – immediately. None of the participants in this study reported seeking their calling – it just came. In some cases, these callings went unidentified as a calling for some time. In other cases, the calling was recognized, but temporarily went

unfulfilled, as in the case of Megan, the stay-at-home mother, who wanted more children and James, the public servant, who initially underachieved during his first stint in college. No matter how the calling was received and nurtured, all 12 participants expressed satisfaction with their calling.

Further Research

The stay-at-home mother of five (Megan) said her calling, at times, comes with a price. It did when she and her husband wanted a second child, but had difficulty conceiving. Her desire for another child caused her to question her calling to her Lord. The calling also caused a burden when she was in public with her children. People are aware of her decision to be a stay-at-home mother and, she believes, that causes people to set unrealistic expectations of her children. “Great, now we have to be perfect. We’re not perfect. In fact, I almost rejoice in the times when my kids act out ... I try to show myself as real.”

Several participants initially hesitated when asked if they possessed a calling, yet later described a strong commitment in their lives, which fits the definition of a calling. Later in the conversation, they used the word “calling” when talking about their lives. Other participants hesitated when asked whether having a calling carried a negative connotation before responding that they believed it did not. Further research that looks at whether having a calling carries a negative connotation is worth pursuing – regardless of the outcome. If possessing a calling carries baggage, the stigma may cause someone to ignore the signs of a calling to avoid the ramifications. However, if possessing a calling is viewed as a positive, the potential roadblocks may be removed. Levoy’s ten

strategies for noncompliance (1997) would indicate that people avoid their callings for varied reasons.

Conversely, determining whether possessing a calling adds status – for example, making a job candidate more viable in the job market – merits consideration. Job candidates who profess a calling to their profession would be desirable in the workplace.

Barbuto and Wheeler (2006) connected servant leadership to altruistic calling when they developed a construct for servant leadership. Further research to determine how calling connects with other leadership theory may be warranted. Finding connections between callings and leadership theory may also shed light on the more fundamental question: Are leaders who have recognized and responded to their callings more effective? Or, does their calling serve as more of a distraction?

Further research may be warranted on the effects of ignoring one's calling. Several participants acknowledged that their callings had a profound and powerful effect on their lives. Whether the inverse is true is worth exploring. How would Megan, the stay-at-home mother of five's life differ had she ignored her calling to her God and her calling to have a family? Would she have felt a profound sense of loss or a void in her life? Finding participants who acknowledge having ignored a calling might prove to be problematic.

Limitations of Results

The findings of this study – that connections, in some cases relationships, can lead to callings – are based on the life descriptions given by 12 residents of a Midwestern community. In addition, the findings of this study do not provide insight into aspects of

calling based on gender, age and race. All 12 participants were Caucasian, although the balance between male and female participants was nearly even. No distinction, however, was made on recognizing callings based on gender. Likewise, participants represented a wide range of ages – from the 30s to the 70s. Again, no distinction was made on recognizing callings based on age.

Readers may be able to find connections with their callings – and how they recognized them – with the rich description provided by the 12 participants. Readers who have not yet experienced a calling – or who are oblivious to their calling – may find the description provided by the study participants enlightening and leading to the discovery of their calling.

Personal Reflection

The results of this study could someday have an impact on my life. I still wait for my first calling. Through my first 49 years, I have never felt the same strong commitment in my life as was described by the participants in my study. Conducting this research made me realize that there is a void in my life. I realized this as I listened to how much joy the stay-at-home mother of five (Megan) has experienced because of her family. I could not relate to the angst she felt as she desired more children, but could not get pregnant. She felt conflict and disappointment. Nor have I felt the extreme joy when she learned she was pregnant again. I also felt this void as I listened to Frank, the business leader and community leader, speak with pride of the advancements his community has made. It's a great place to live, he told me.

Finally, I felt this void as David, the former business owner and humanitarian, talked about the frustration and later satisfaction he felt devoting himself to helping people a world away. Those who know me and my life, might interject here. Didn't you feel this calling during the 11 years you ran the Omaha Ronald McDonald House? You helped nearly one thousand families with sick children during a most difficult time. Surely, that must have been a calling? Sadly no. While the desire to help those families, especially their children, was strong and sometimes consuming, I never felt that working at the Ronald McDonald House was what I was called to do. I always felt that I would someday move on to something else – and I did after 11 years. Now, I am a fundraiser who helps nonprofit organizations with their major development efforts. I am assisting a Catholic parish in Houston raise money for a badly needed school. Is this a calling? First, it's early. But likely no. At this point, I don't believe it is something I was meant to do.

So I wait. Not to the extent that I am – following Elmer Gantry's example – searching for my calling, but never to the point of fabricating it. Schuster (2003) is guiding my search. "A call is the impulse to move ahead in a meaningful way. It is a mind-body push into the future. A call is passion, desire, and choice, all rolled into one" (p. 14).

This study – pardon the cliché – has opened my eyes. It also taught me – pardon another cliché – that good things come to those who wait. The participants didn't seek their callings. Their callings came when they weren't expecting them. From my perspective, this approach would make receiving a calling all the more poignant. So I

wait for that moment, experience or interaction with the person who will serve as my mentor. I wait for my calling. And I hope I recognize it when it comes.

Most compelling was my discussion with the educator (Julie) as she talked about her father's unfulfilled calling to be a coach. Whether her father felt called to coach and ignored his calling or never recognized his calling is unknown. My hope is that this study may help others recognize when they are called.

Callings hit home. Which leads to my father – and his callings to serve his profession as a weekly newspaper editor, his community as an informal leader and his God. As a child, I wasn't always the biggest fan of his callings. His profession often meant we could not venture far or for long on family vacations. A weekly newspaper must be published each week, and these enterprises often run on small workforces. That meant the Warneke family stayed close to home. Next came his role as a leader in his community – one that was never recognized through a vote or appointment to public office. Jaycees. Chamber of Commerce. Hospital Board. The community's annual festival. These organizations, while important, also require commitment from their members.

My father spent many evenings away from home – either getting the latest edition of his newspaper ready for publication or attending meetings to plan the community's next important event. Then, there was his devotion to his God. His devotion meant the Warneke family attended worship service each Sunday, and sometimes in between. As a youngster, attending church was akin to torture. Sit up straight and listen to what the pastor said. Attending was the only option. While I originally resented his callings – although I did not categorize them as callings at the time – I now appreciate them. I

realize he was only responding to his callings and doing his best to answer them. His life is testimony that answering a calling can have a profound impact on society. I can only hope that it is not too late for me to someday have this kind of impact on society.

Summary

The life experiences of 12 residents of a Midwestern community who were identified as likely possessing a calling provided the insights that serve as the foundation for this study. The participants were asked to discuss the important things in their lives, and the strong commitments they felt toward them. They were asked whether they believed they possessed a calling – and they overwhelmingly acknowledged – either initially or ultimately – that they possessed one. These callings, the participants agreed, at times presented challenges in their lives, but left them more fulfilled.

In comparing the experiences shared by the participants in this study, several themes emerged. Several participants identified the roles of their mentors as the source of their callings. These mentors challenged participants to meet expectations and serve others. Other participants credited life experiences for their callings. These moments came at different times in their lives, but were no less profound. Calls to serve their community and their God were experienced by several participants. These calls to service led the participants to better their communities. These calls to their God led participants to direct their lives according to His teachings. The participants also revealed that their callings came unexpectedly. Several participants acknowledged that they were experiencing multiple callings – all of which mostly were compatible. Finally, the participants explained that their lives were more complete because of their callings.

Appendix A

Interview Protocol

Project: “You Just Know”: A Phenomenological Study Examining How to Recognize When You’re Called

Time of Interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

Position of Interviewee (team):

Callings sometimes go unrecognized, thus preventing people from living up to their potential. The purpose of this study, using community newspaper editors as participants, is to explore how to recognize one’s callings, how to gauge their strength, and how to resolve the potential conflict that is created should these callings collide. Only the principal and secondary investigator will know the identities of participants. Interviews will take an estimated 15 to 30 minutes and be conducted, when possible, following a game in which the manager has participated. Participants will be asked to review and sign a consent form, indicating their willingness to participate in this study. They will be informed that they may withdraw at any time.

Questions:

What are the experiences (of community newspaper editors) that lead to feelings of strong commitment in their lives?” From this starting point, additional questions will be asked and topics addressed:

1. Please describe the experiences in your lives that led you to feel commitment toward your profession? Your community? Your family? And your faith?

Probe: How did you first realize you had this commitment?

2. Please describe the times (or experiences) when you felt any of these commitments went hand in hand with other commitments. How did you respond?

Probe: Did these multiple commitments, or callings, cause challenges in your life or do you view the outcomes as more positive?

Appendix A continued

3. Do you view your callings as more of a blessing or a hindrance? Why?
Probe: Please give examples.

Following the interview, participants will be thanked for their time and reminded that they may withdraw at any time. They will be reassured that their identity will remain unrevealed in the study. They will be given the investigator's telephone number.

Appendix B



IRB# 20110611792 EP
Date Approved: 06/02/2011
Valid Until: 06/01/2012

INSTITUTE OF AGRICULTURE AND NATURAL RESOURCES
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURAL LEADERSHIP,
EDUCATION AND COMMUNICATION

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Identification of Project:

Called to serve: A phenomenological study examining how to understand one's callings, and how to respond to them when they collide.

Purpose of the Research:

This research project will explore how people recognize their callings and how they respond to these callings. You are invited to participate in this study because you were identified by a leader in your community as someone who might be or has experienced a calling. All participants must be 19 years or older.

Procedures:

Participation in this project will require approximately 30 minutes of your time. You will be interviewed by the primary investigator, and the conversation will be recorded. The interview will take place at a location of your choice in your community. Your answers may be included in the dissertation written by the primary investigator, and in an article, which the investigator hopes will be published in an academic journal.

Risks and/or Discomforts:

There are no known risks or discomforts associated with this project.

Benefits:

By assisting with the project and sharing your knowledge about your life experiences, you may help others recognize their callings and how to respond to them.

Confidentiality:

Participants will not be identified in the dissertation or article written for this project.

Compensation:

There will be no compensation for participating in this project.

Opportunity to Ask Questions:

You may ask any questions concerning this research and have those questions answered before agreeing to be interviewed for this project. You may call the primary investigator at any time at (402) 612-9151. Should you have questions about your rights as a research participant, if you wish to talk to someone other than the investigators or if you have input about the research process, you may contact the office of the Institutional Review Board at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, (402) 472-6965. You may also contact the secondary investigator, Dr. James King at UNL by calling (402) 472-3022.

Freedom to Withdraw:

Participation in this study is voluntary. You can refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without harming your relationship with the researchers or the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

Appendix B continued**Consent, Right to Receive a Copy:**

You are voluntarily making a decision whether or not to participate in this research study. Your signature certifies that you have decided to participate having read and understood the information presented. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep.

_____ Check if you agree to be audio-taped during the interview.

Signature of Participant:

Signature of Research Participant

Date

Name and Phone Number of Investigator(s)

Kevin Warneke, MA, Principal Investigator
James King, Ph.D., Secondary Investigator

Office: (402) 612-9151
Office: (402) 472-3022

Appendix C



COLLEGE OF COMMUNICATION, FINE ARTS AND MEDIA
School of Communication
Broadcasting Journalism Speech

December 10, 2012

External Review of Qualitative Study

The following is a summary of my external review I completed on a qualitative research study conducted by Kevin Warneke, a doctoral candidate at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. The central question explored in his qualitative study was presented as "What are the experiences that lead to feelings of strong commitment in their lives?"

These are the review steps I completed:

- 1) I became familiar with the purpose of the study and the overall research question through discussions with the researcher.
- 2) I reviewed the sample interview transcripts, and met with the researcher to verify his coding.
- 3) I examined the thematic analysis and the researcher's interpretations. I also verified that they were consistent with the sample transcript reviewed.

Following my review of these documents, I met with the researcher to discuss my assessment of his study, including coding procedures and thematic findings. I consider this study to be well-designed. I believe the coding procedure to be an accurate representation of the research participants' experiences related to their callings in life. The study also appears to have been conducted in an ethical manner using procedures and protocols reflective of rigorous qualitative research.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "D. Ogden".

David Ogden, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of Communication
University of Nebraska at Omaha

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